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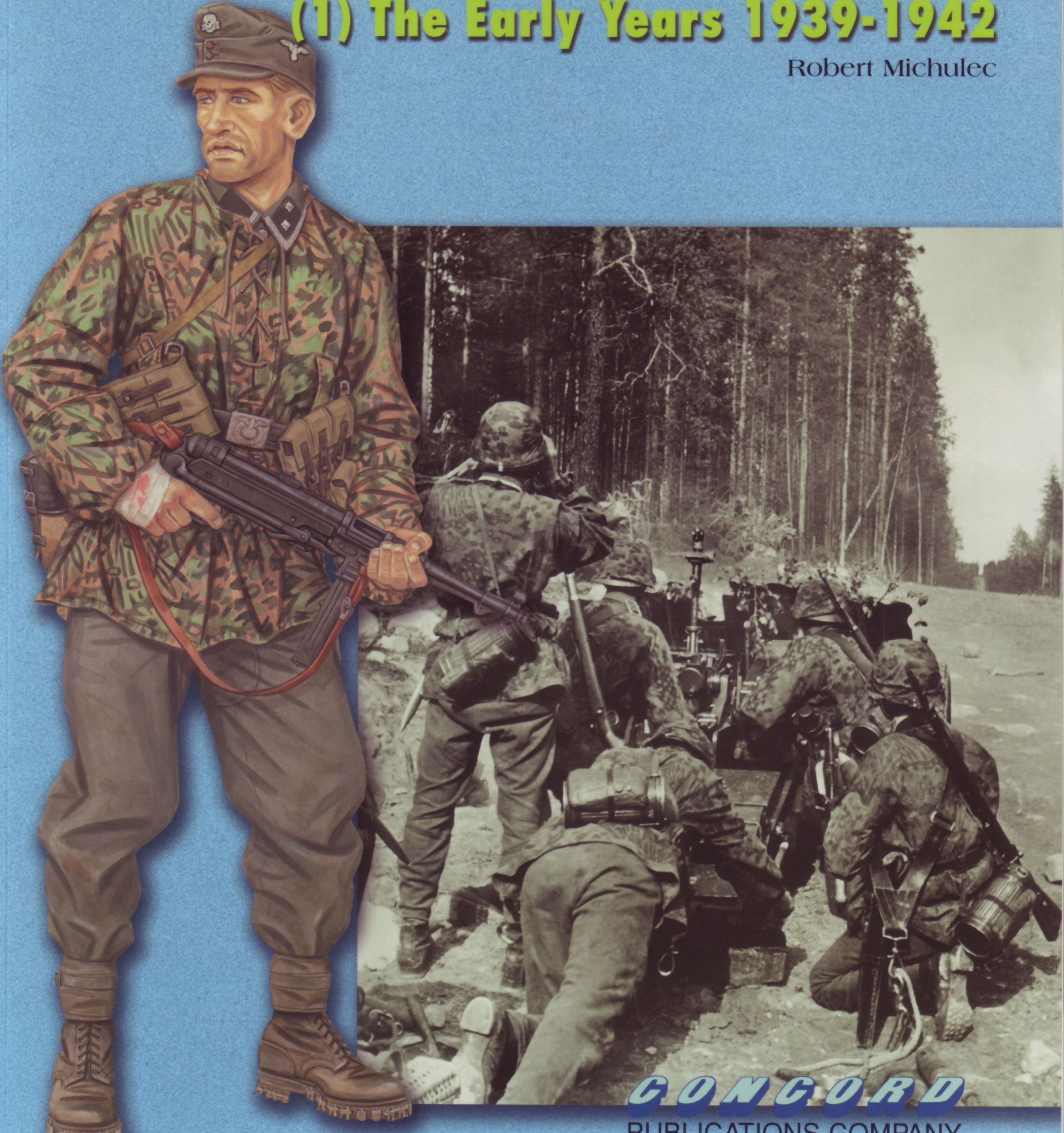
Waffen-SS at War

(1) The Early Years 1939-1942

Robert Michulec



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Text: Robert Michulec
Editor: Gordon Rottman
Color Plates: Stephen Andrew

Technical Editor: Frank De Sisto
German spell check: Ralph Zwilling
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603-609 Castle Peak Road
Kong Nam Industrial Building
10/F, B1, Tsuen Wan
New Territories, Hong Kong
www.concord-publications.com

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ISBN 962-361-105-6
printed in Hong Kong

Introduction

The most controversial military organization of the Third Reich was the notorious Waffen-SS. From a purely military, organizational and historical standpoint, it is also one of the most interesting and complex.

The Waffen-SS was an outgrowth of the Allgemeine-SS (General-SS) or Gesamt-SS (Total-SS). The initials, "SS" (typically depicted in the familiar runic lightning bolts), means Schutz Staffeln—"Protection Squads," as the organization originally served to protect senior party officials. "Waffen" means "Armed" and defines the organization's role as the military branch or combat arm of the SS.

The Waffen-SS was created on 6 December 1939, by consolidating several existing organizations, essentially paramilitary forces. These were the SS-Verfügungstruppe (Special Disposal Troops—internal security guards—SS-VT), Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" (Life Guard Regiment—Hitler's bodyguard—LAH), elements of the SS-Totenkopfverbände (Death's Head Formation—concentration camp guards and reserve security units), certain Ordnungspolizei (Order Police) units which had previously been placed under the authority of the SS, and other minor organizations such as SS-Heimwehr Danzig (Home Defense Danzig). The Waffen-SS acted as a "second army," albeit an extremely politicized one, but was not a component of the Wehrmacht (National Defense Force) as were the Heer (Army), Kriegsmarine (Navy), and Luftwaffe (Air Force). Initially, tactical control of Waffen-SS units in the field was vested in the Army.

The 1939 Polish Campaign saw limited employment of armed SS elements, namely SS-Verfügungstruppe units and SS-Heimwehr Danzig (which fought in that city against Polish paramilitary units at the war's beginning), in ad hoc formations, namely Panzerverband Kempf (Armor Formation Kempf), a.k.a. Panzerverband Ostpreußen or Panzerdivision Kempf. The SS units performed well in Poland. However, their reputation for atrocities also began there, with, for example, the massacre of Polish paramilitary units after their surrender at the Danzig post office. After the Polish Campaign the Waffen-SS units (which had very little formal combat-oriented training) began to train in earnest to conduct conventional combat operations. Due to the Byzantine nature of the on-going political machinations between the Nazi Party and the German Army, the army was initially reluctant to accept these unproven "political" units. They were rightly skeptical of the future ability of what they termed "Asphalt Soldiers" to perform on the battlefield.

The early Waffen-SS divisions went through a bewildering series of re-designations and reorganizations after the first (the SS-Verfügungstruppe-Division) was raised in October 1939. To provide an example of the designation changes endured by divisions, this division was at one time or another designated SS-Verfügungstruppe-Division, SS-Verfügungs-Division (mot.), SS-Division "Deutschland", SS-Division "Das Reich", SS-Panzergrenadierdivision "Das Reich" and finally, 2.SS-Panzerdivision "Das Reich". The second Waffen-SS division to be organized used as its core Hitler's personal guard, the Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler", which was a brigade-sized motorized formation. "LAH" also went through a number of re-designations before being named 1.SS-Panzerdivision Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler", on 22 October 1943.

As Reichsführer der SS Heinrich Himmler continued to expand his empire, the Waffen-SS continued to grow. Initially, recruiting standards were very strict, with mental and physical prowess, as well as "racial purity" being considered. Then, in 1940, "racially pure" ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) from occupied countries were recruited. "Aryan" troops were soon recruited from occupied Western and Northern European countries, ostensibly to aid Germany in the fight against Bolshevism. By the spring of 1943, 11 Waffen-SS divisions had been raised, though some had not yet seen combat. At this time they bore the following designations:

SS-Panzergrenadier-Division Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Das Reich"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division"Totenkopf"
SS-Polizei-Division
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking"
SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord"
SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"
SS-Kavallerie-Division
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Hohenstaufen"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Karl der Grosse" (later re-named "Frundsberg")
SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Nordland"

These divisions would go through further re-designations, honorific name changes and reorganizations; and beginning in the autumn of 1943, they would receive numbers, 1 to 11, respectively. Another 27 Waffen-SS divisions would be raised by the end of the war, although many of the late-war divisions were of poor quality, or were in fact, only "paper" formations. Waffen-SS small unit designations were much different than those employed by the Army and can be confusing. The following are some examples.

Waffen-SS	**Heer**	**US Army**
Schare	Gruppe	Squad
Trupp	Zug	Platoon
Sturm	Kompanie/Batterie	Company/Battery
Sturmbann	Bataillon/Abteilung	Battalion
Standarte	Regiment	Regiment

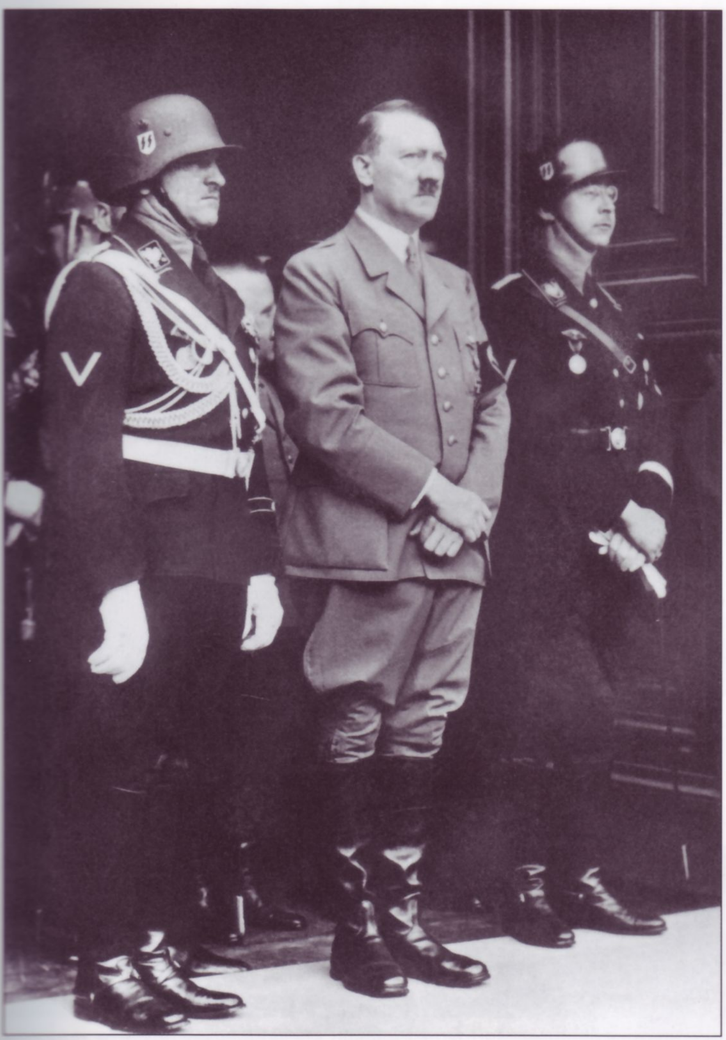
These designations also caused problems within the German Army under whose control Waffen-SS units fought. As a result, the Waffen-SS adopted Army unit designation terms in January 1940, although regiments continued to be called "Standarten" until September 1940. The Waffen-SS rank system was equally dissimilar from traditional German practices. This system employed the earlier SS unit hierarchy designations, which it continued to do after units changed their designations. In addition, some rank titles changed during the course of the war; those listed here were in effect during 1942. Waffen-SS and German Army rank systems were complex with many specialized ranks provided for. The examples listed here are the basic ranks.

Waffen-SS	**Heer**	**US Army**
SS-Schütze	Schütze	Private
SS-Oberschütze	Oberschütze	Private 1st Class
SS-Sturmmann	Gefreiter	--
SS-Rottenführer	Obergefreiter	Corporal
SS-Unterscharführer	Unteroffizier	Sergeant
SS-Scharführer	Unterfeldwebel	Staff Sergeant
SS-Oberscharführer	Feldwebel	Technical Sergeant
SS-Hauptscharführer	Oberfeldwebel	Master Sergeant
SS-Sturmscharführer	Stabsfeldwebel	--
SS-Untersturmführer	Leutnant	2nd Lieutenant
SS-Obersturmführer	Oberleutnant	1st Lieutenant
SS-Hauptsturmführer	Hauptmann	Captain
SS-Sturmbannführer	Major	Major
SS-Obersturmbannführer	Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant Colonel
SS-Standartenführer	Oberst	Colonel
SS-Oberführer	--	Brigadier General
SS-Brigadeführer	Generalmajor	Major General
SS-Gruppenführer	Generalleutnant	Lieutenant General
SS-Obergruppenführer	General	General
SS-Oberstgruppenführer	Generaloberst	--
Reichsführer-SS	Heinrich Himmler	--

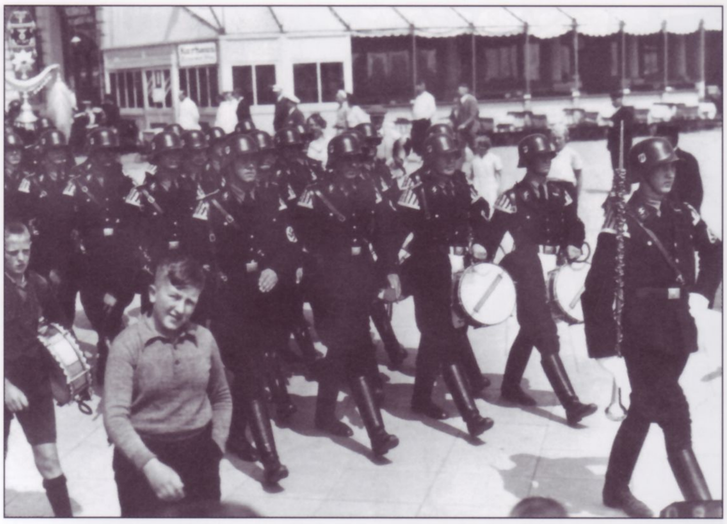
Note: The ranks of SS-Brigadeführer and higher, additionally carried an Army rank title, e.g., SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS.

The Waffen-SS used many of the same weapons and equipment as the Army, but the rapid growth of the Army and the rest of the Wehrmacht meant there were often insufficient numbers of modern, standardized weapons on hand. Similar to the often international personnel make-up of some Waffen-SS units, they were also armed with foreign weapons impounded or captured throughout Europe. Many older or obsolescent weapons were also employed, especially in the early days, as will be seen in the following photographs.

Through the early part of the war, the Waffen-SS would see combat on most fronts, including Poland, France, the Low Countries, the Balkans, Russia, and Finland. The Waffen-SS would continue to grow to include the formation of corps and armies. They would often serve as elite forces or "fire brigades," to reinforce faltering units in the frontline, or conduct counterattacks against enemy breakthroughs. Other Waffen-SS units, not so "elite" or well-equipped, would conduct unsavory anti-partisan operations or plug holes in the front line. The combat capabilities of Waffen-SS units were varied. As more were raised, resources, materiel and manpower pools dried up; as a result the overall quality of the service declined.



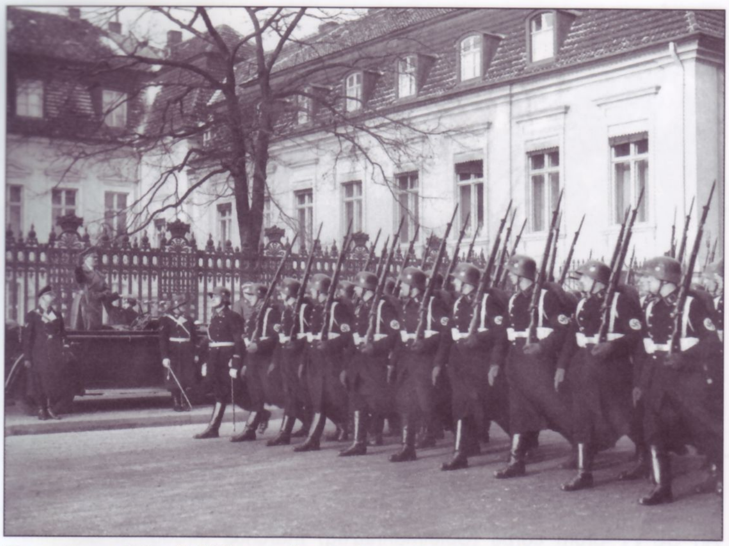
Der Führer and his guardsmen of Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" ("LAH") in the black parade uniform of the SS-Verfügungstruppen (SS-VT). To Hitler's right is SS-Obergruppenführer Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich, commander of the "LAH". The "LAH" wore white leather gear on 20 April (Hitler's birthday) and other special occasions. Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler (on the left) wears the standard black leather gear. Dietrich and Himmler both wear brown shirts even though the "LAH" had adopted white shirts in 1937 along with white gloves. Dietrich wears the silver aiguillette used by SS-VT officers during special occasions of the same design as worn by the Army. Both Dietrich and Himmler wear the silver inverted "Honor Chevron for Old Campaigners" on their right sleeves, identifying them as having been members of the SS prior to 30 January 1933.



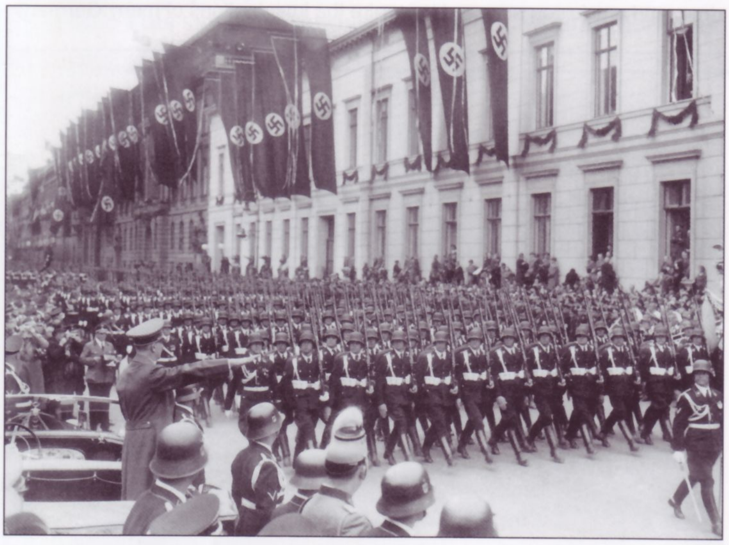
An SS-VT drum corps (Spielmannszug) marches through a city plaza adorned in the black parade uniform with black leather gear. The silver-trimmed "swallow's nests" (Schwalbennester) on their shoulders are a traditional means of identifying musicians. Music Corpsmen wore the same "swallow's nest", but with silver tassels along the lower edge. The drum corps' "Jingling Johnnie" (Schellenbaum) can be seen to the left. The SS drum and music corps served to inspire the imaginations of many Germans.

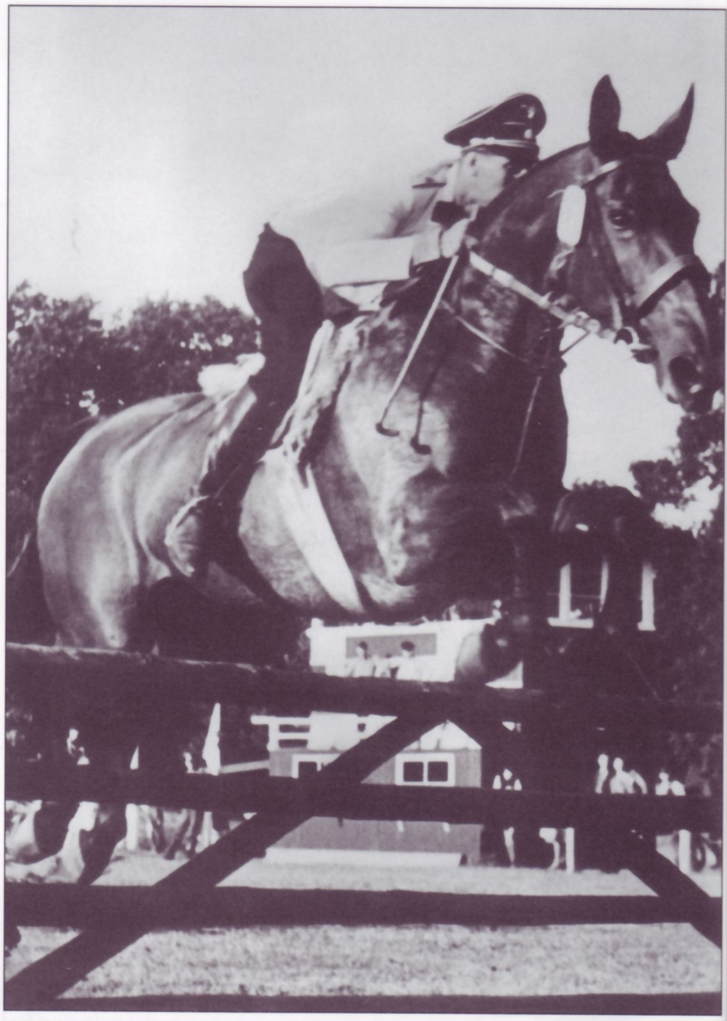
Dietrich, Hitler, and Deluege (Chief of the Ordnungspolizei—ORPO) attend the funeral of three "LAH" members on 3 July 1936. The musicians in the right foreground do not wear their "swallow's nests" with their field gray uniforms.

Hitler and Dietrich take the salute of the "LAH" at their Kaserne (barracks) in mid-December 1935. The troops wear the field gray greatcoat with black collar tabs and a mix of new M35 and old M16 helmets. Dietrich's field gray greatcoat collar is open to reveal the light gray-faced lapels below the dark bottle green collar, indicating his rank as a general officer.

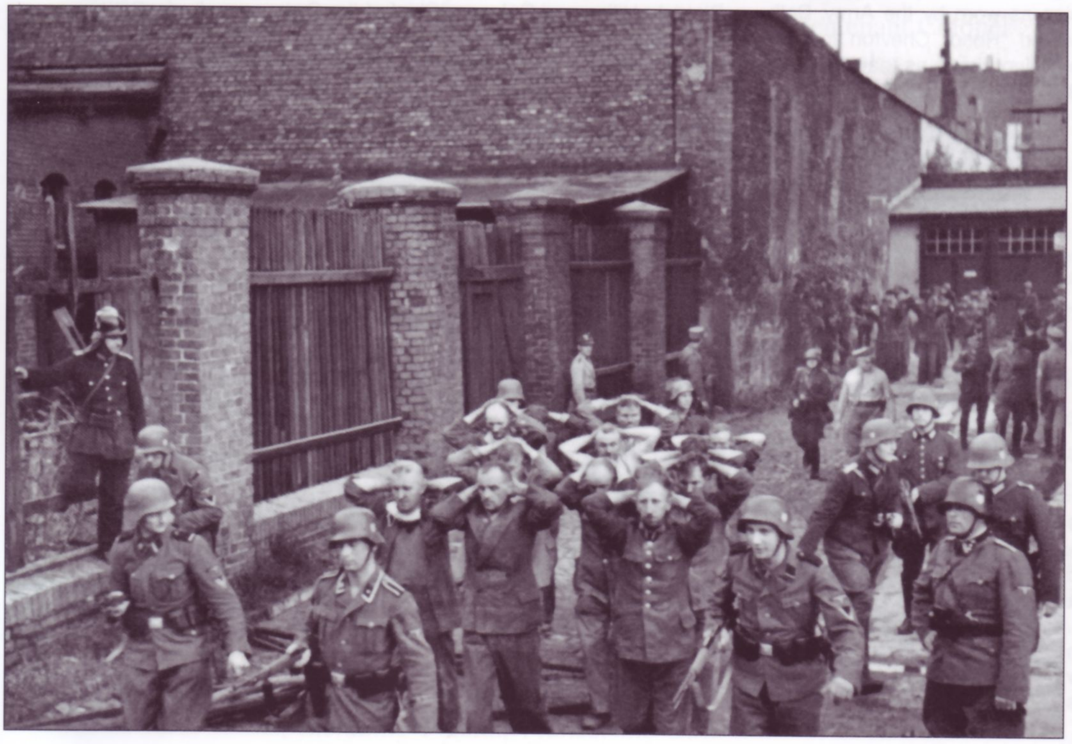


Two views of the "LAH" parading before Hitler, Himmler, and Dietrich. The first photograph was taken on 30 January 1937 on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1933 Nazi rise to power. The second photograph was taken in the summer of 1936, when white leather gear was introduced for special occasions.

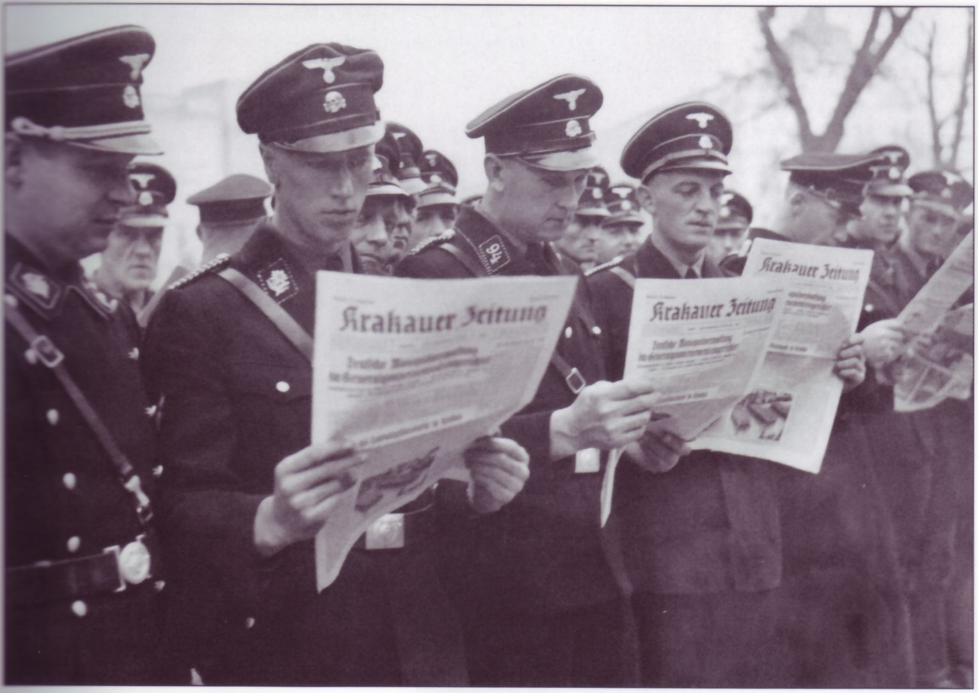




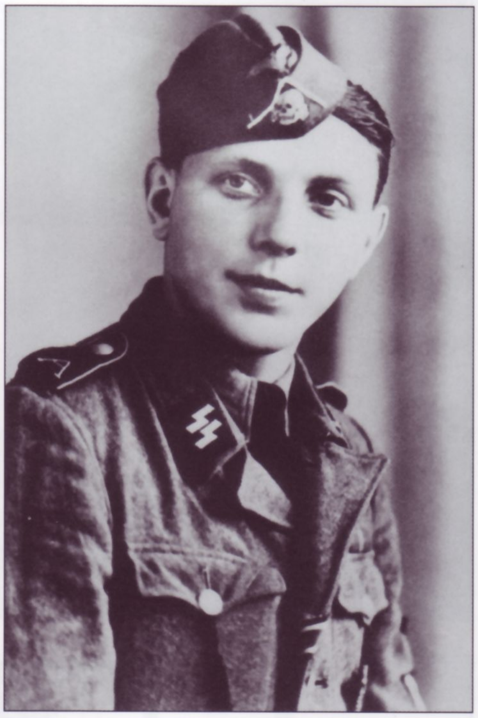
SS-Standartenführer Hermann Fegelein surmounts an obstacle during a horse competition in Hamburg, June 1939. Fegelein was the commander of the Main Riding School (Hauptreiterschule) in Munich, the center for the equestrian training of SS officers, as well as the home of German teams participating in international competition. He wears the white summer tunic with black trousers authorized for wear between 1 April and 30 September. They were restricted from further wear on 15 June 1940, for the war's duration.

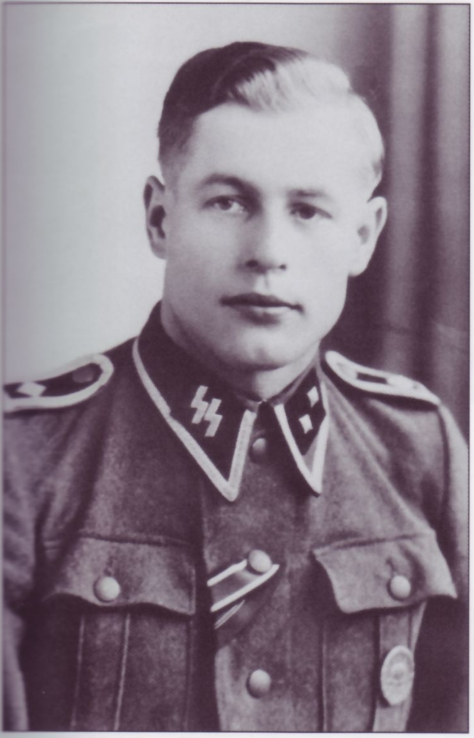


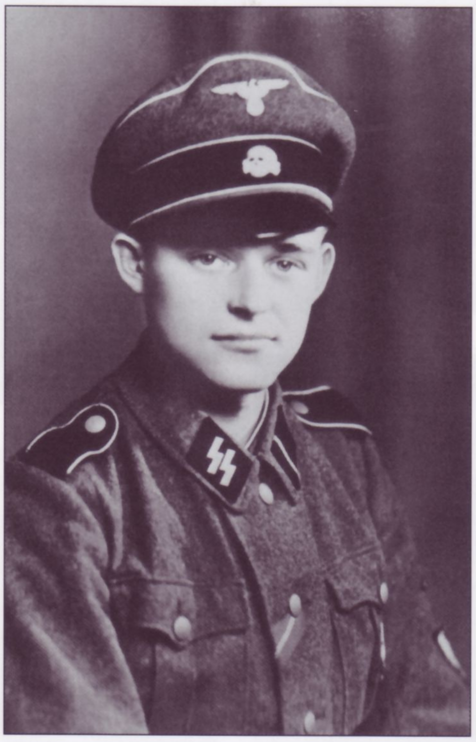
Soldiers of the SS-Heimwehr Danzig (Home Defense Danzig) escort Polish prisoners of war captured during the hard fighting at the Polish post office in Gdansk (Danzig). Among the defenders were postal workers, all of whom were later murdered by their SS captors. Behind the SS men are members of the Danzig Ordnungspolizei (Order Police).

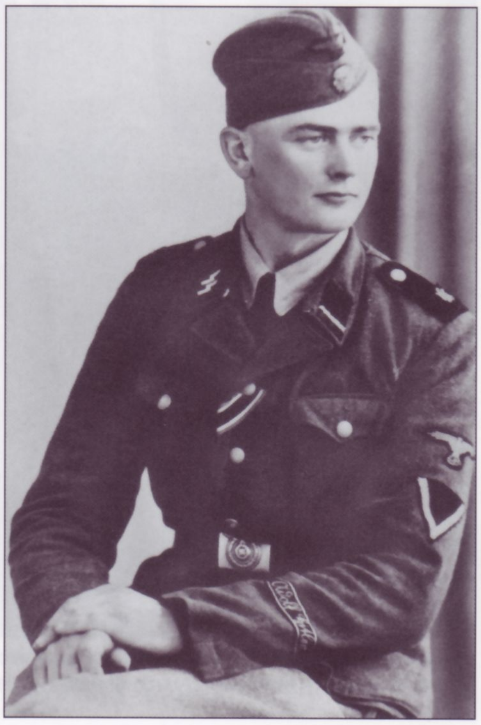


A group of Allgemeine-SS (General-SS) men from different units, who were sent to Poland for administrative duties connected with the occupation, read the German language newspaper "Krakauer Zeitung"—"Cracow Journel". The two men standing to the left wear the distinctive "Edelweiss" collar patches of 87. SS-Fuss-Standarte (Foot Regiment) from Innsbruck, while to the right is an NCO of 94. SS-Fuss-Standarte, from Leoben/Mur. Germany was divided into SS senior districts (SS-Oberabschnitte), which were in turn sub-divided into districts (SS-Abschnitte), each with two-to-four foot regiments. These were not combat units, but basically manpower pools that were eventually absorbed into the later Waffen-SS. Officers wore silver-edged collars and collar patches, while NCOs wore twisted (or alternating) silver and black piping.









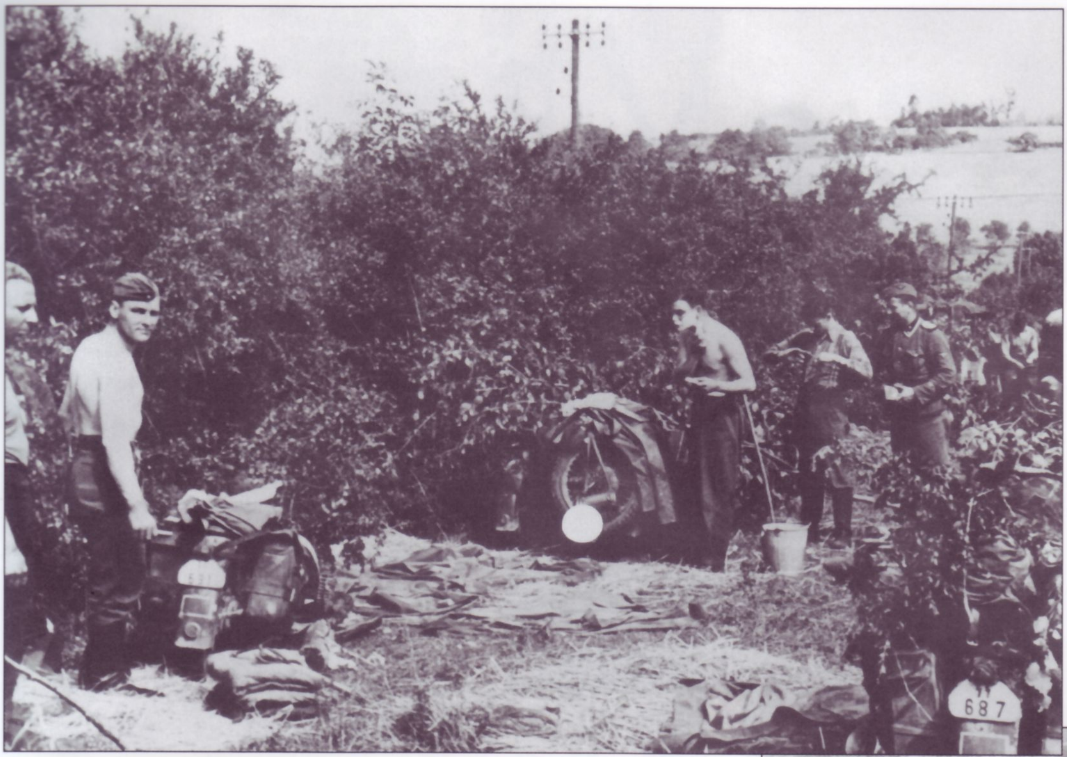
(left to right, top to bottom) .

An SS-Oberscharführer. As an NCO, he is entitled to wear the 9mm wide collar braid. His shoulder straps and collar tabs are black with silver devices and braid. In his tunic buttonhole he wears the Iron Cross 2nd Class and Winter Battle Medal in the East, 1941/42 ribbons. The latter was known simply as the "East Medal" or "Frozen Meat Order" (Gefrierfleischorden). On his breast pocket he wears the Wound Badge in Silver indicating he has been wounded three to five times.

This SS-Sturmmann additionally identified by a single inverted chevron on the left upper sleeve. He wears the "East Medal" ribbon in his buttonhole and a Wound Badge. His uniform is made of low quality wool, and his black shoulder straps are edged in his arm-of-service color (Waffenfarbe), in this case, white for the infantry.

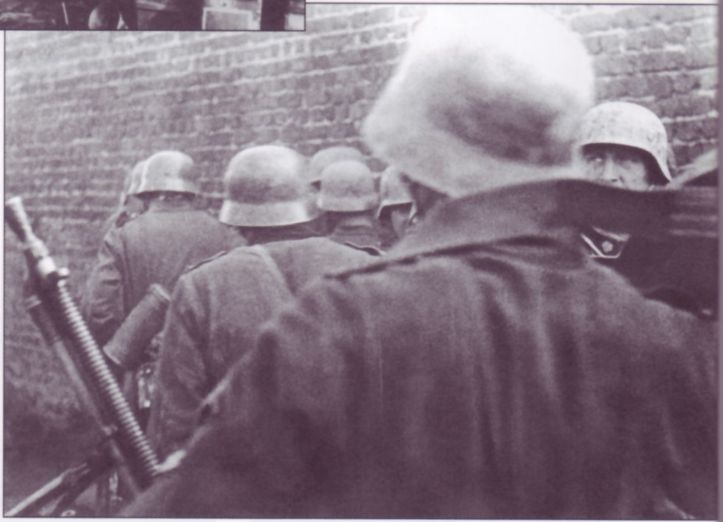
This SS-Sturmmann wears the field cap, generally known as a "little boat cap" (Schiffchenmütze) with a Waffenfarbe chevron. The silver-gray embroidered "A" device on his shoulder strap is identifies him as a member of the SS-VT Artillerie-Standarte.

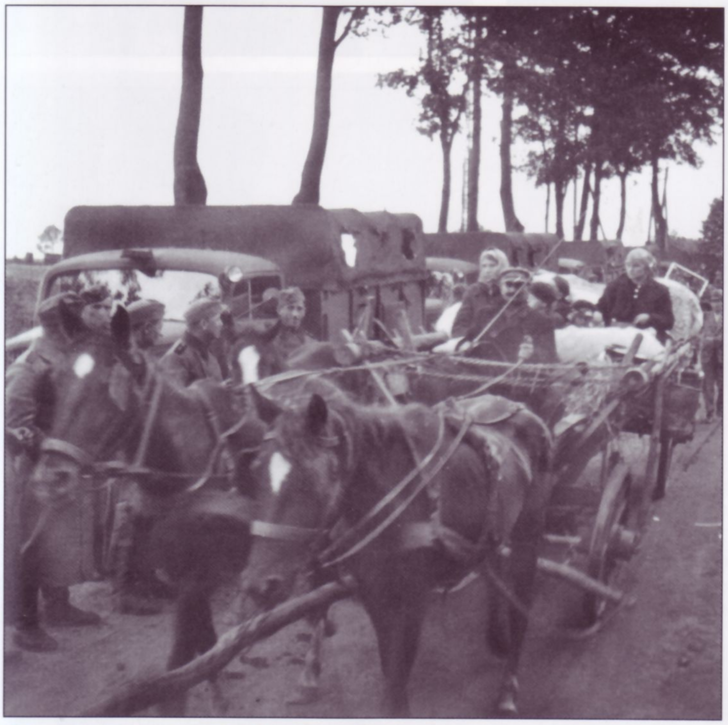
An SS-Sturmmann wears the embroidered "LAH" device on his shoulder straps and the regiment's cuff band inscribed with Adolph Hitler's autograph in silver on black. The SS eagle is worn on the left sleeve. All other armed services wore their versions of the national eagle over the right breast pocket.



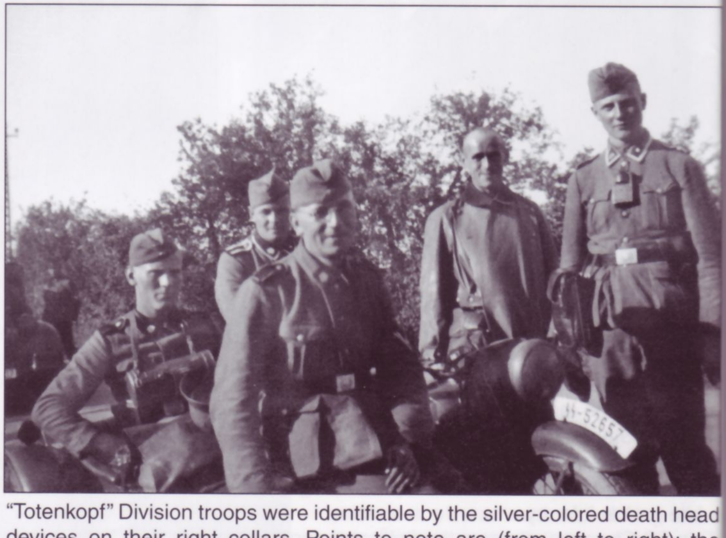
A Waffen-SS unit takes a rest from their pursuit of fleeing French forces in June 1940. The SS registration plate is fitted over the white tactical symbol for a motorized rifle unit. All Waffen-SS vehicles had vehicle registration plates prefixed by the black runic lightning bolts.

A Gruppe (squad) of "Totenkopf" Division soldiers during the fighting at le Corret Malo in June 1940. The death's head badge worn by the division can be seen on a soldier's collar patch over the machine-gunner's shoulder. The gunner is armed with a Czechoslovak 7.92mm zv.26, which the Germans called the MG26(t). The British Bren gun was derived from this weapon.

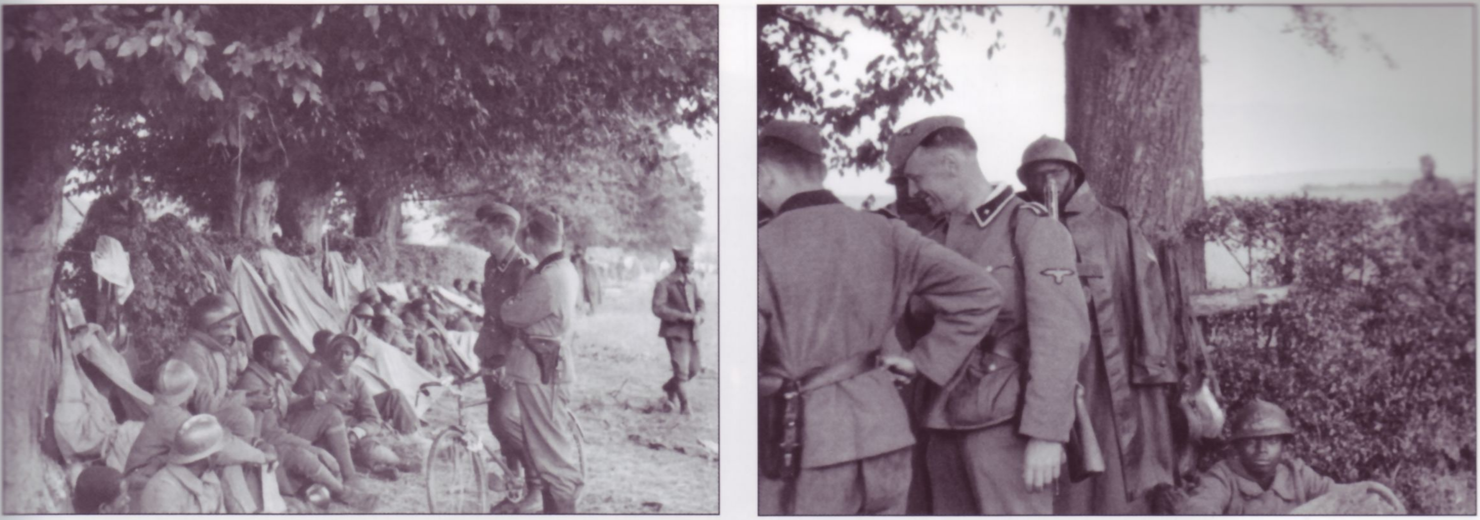




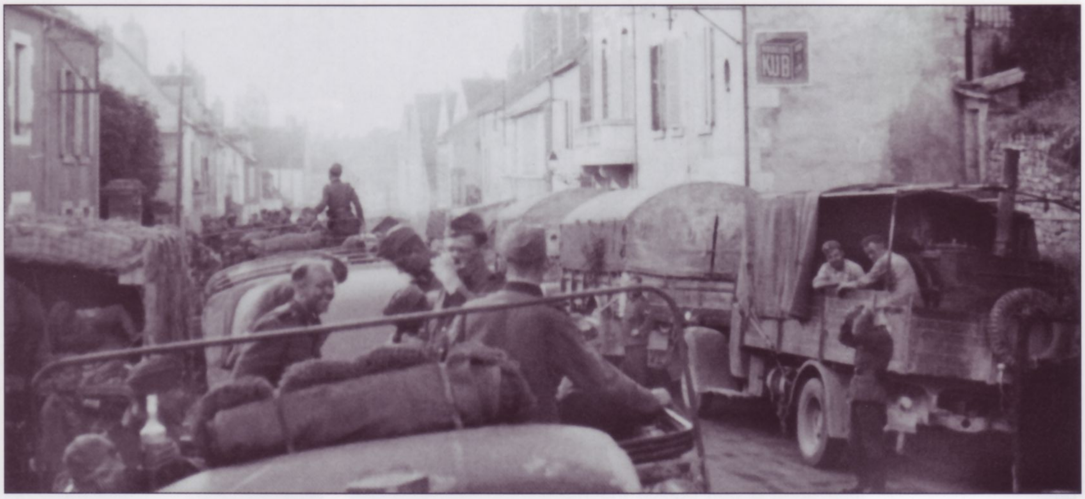
Refugees pass a halted "Totenkopf" Division unit column. The trucks appear to be some sort of mobile repair shops. Similar trucks also held radio equipment.



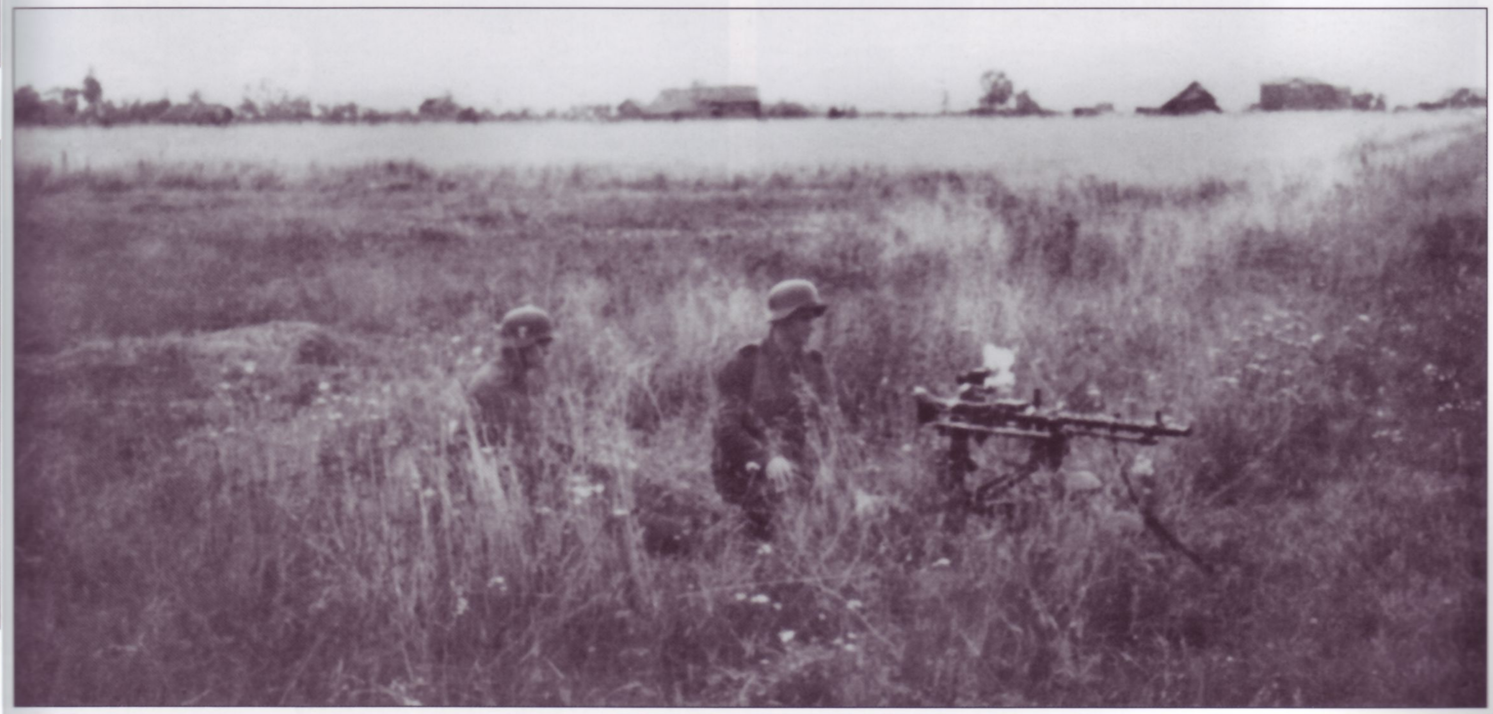
"Totenkopf" Division troops were identifiable by the silver-colored death head devices on their right collars. Points to note are (from left to right): the gasmask carrying case (Tragbüchse für Gasmaske) carried on the chest as prescribed for motorcyclists, the rubberized motorcyclist's protection coat (Schutzmantel für Kraftradfahrer, known simply as a Kradmantel), and the field pocket lamp (Feldtaschenlampe) attached to a tunic button as was standard practice.



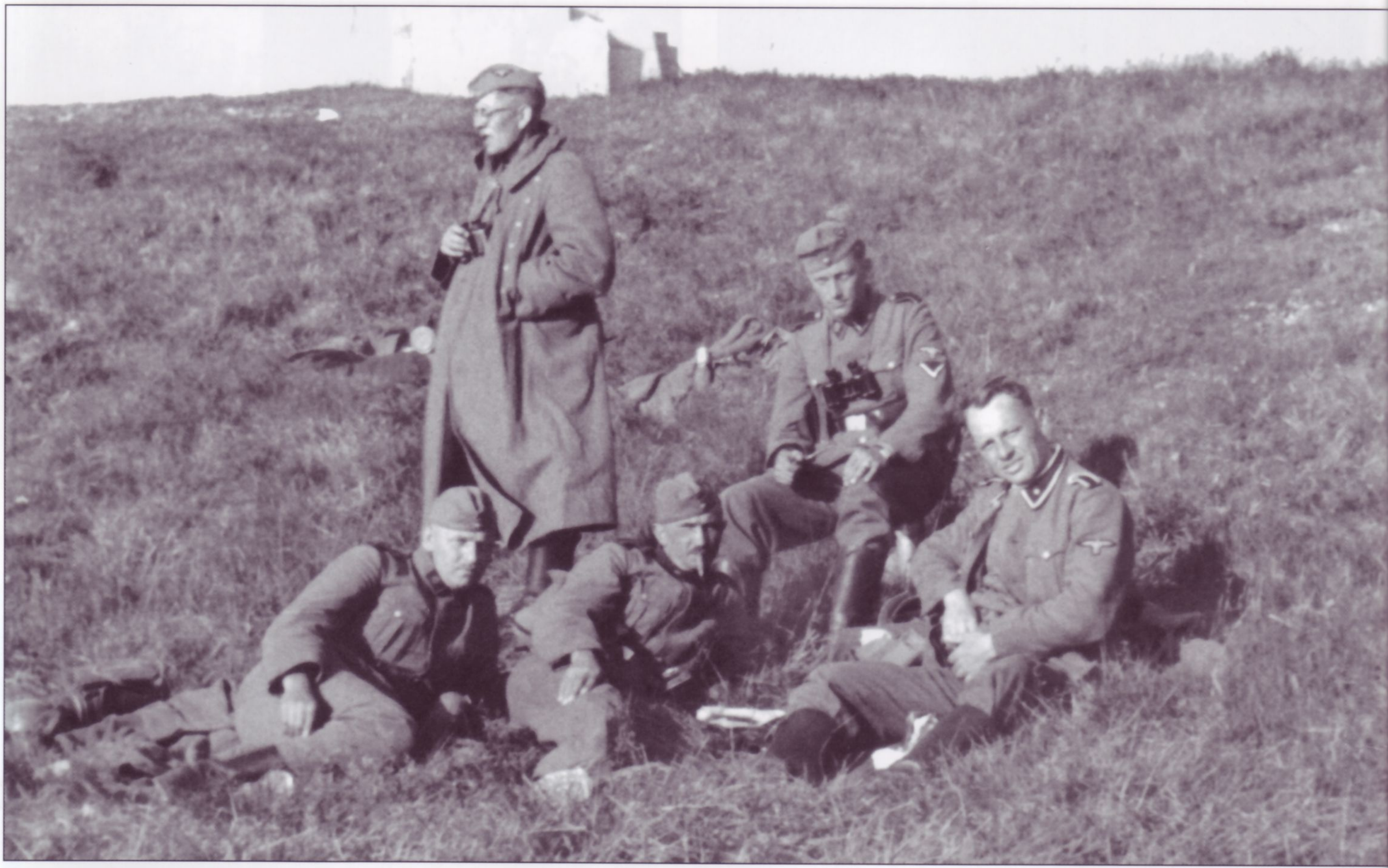
France, 1940. "Totenkopf" Division troops stand guard over a group of prisoners from a régiment de tirailleurs sénégalais (Senegalese Tirailleurs regiment). The photograph does not accurately reflect what the SS men may of thought of the Africian troops. One can only imagine what the west Africian troops thought of their plight fighting for the French so far from home. The smiling SS-man is an SS-Unterscharführer, equavalent to a Heeres Unteroffizier. He is armed with a 9mm Erma machine pistol, which was used to by the Waffen-SS and Police, and to some extent by the Heer.



A "Totenkopf" Division convoy passes through a town. To the right is a small field stove mounted in the cargo compartment of a truck. It can serve 50 to 125 men. The large field stove could serve 125-225. The stoves were the same as the horse-drawn type provided to non-motorized units. These stoves, whether truck-mounted or horse-drawn, could operate on the move.

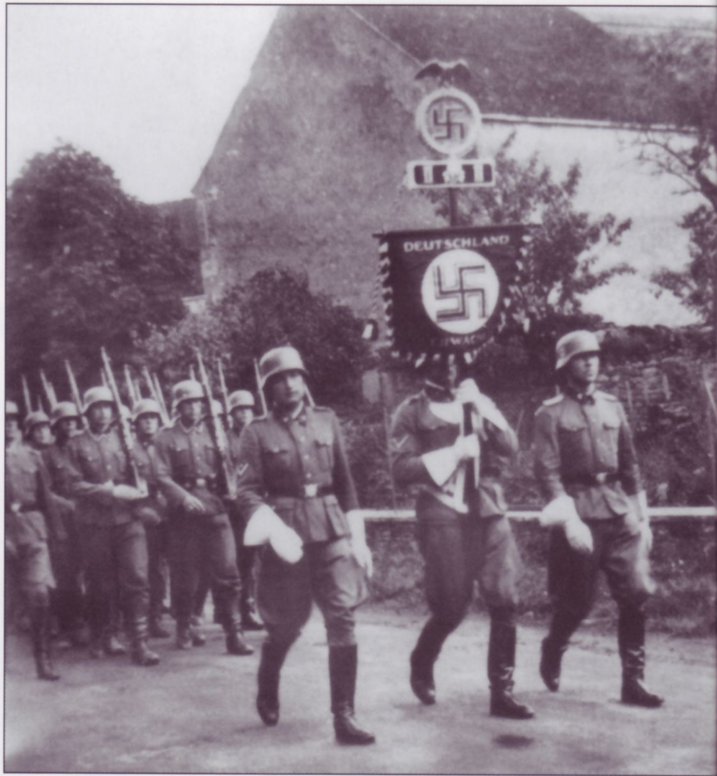


An MG34 heavy machine gun crew has set their gun up in a hasty position on the edge of a field. Used on a bipod only as the rifle group's (squad) light machine gun, this same weapon, served in the heavy machine gun role providing long-range fire support when mounted on a tripod and provided with an optical sight. To obtain the sustained fire capability necessary for this role, they were provided three or four spare barrels. Group light machine guns had only one spare barrel.

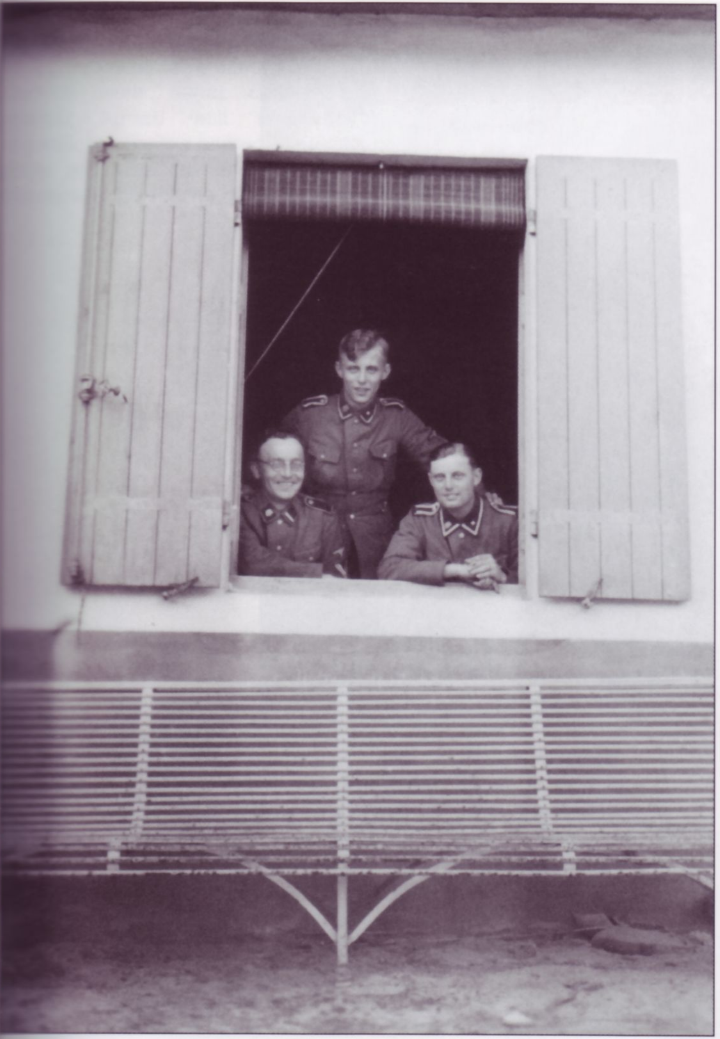


A group of "Totenkopf" Division soldiers relaxes. Waffen-SS troops could be differentiated from Heeres troops by numerous insignia distinctions: Waffen-SS-style eagle on the left side of the field cap and left upper arm, black collar facing, black shoulder straps, and black-backed sleeve rank insignia, here a SS-Sturmmann, equivalent to a Heeres Gefreiter. Besides Heeres-style rank shoulder straps and sleeve insignia for the appropriate ranks, the Waffen-SS wore SS rank insignia on the left collar and either SS runes or other distinctive insignia on the right collar rather than the Heeres double collar bars. The Waffen-SS also used a belt buckle inscribed Meine Ehre heißt Treue! (My Honor is my Loyalty!) as opposed to the Heeres buckle bearing "Gott Mit Uns" (God is with us).

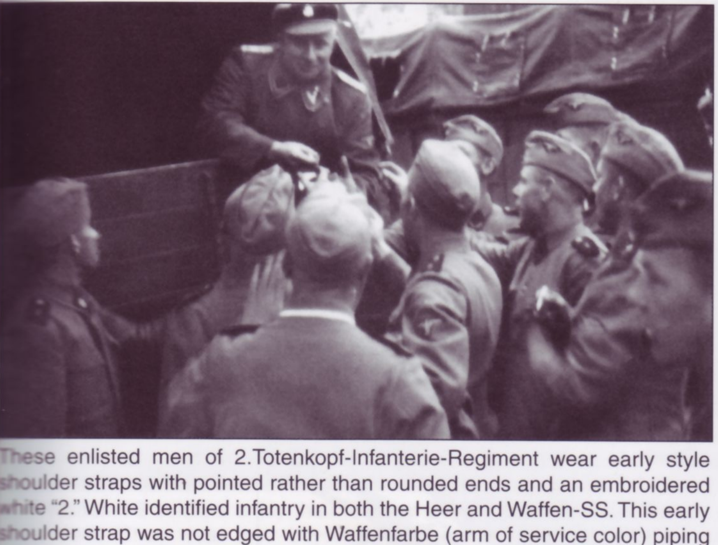
"Totenkopf" Division pioneers construct a bridge using local materials aided by locally confiscated boats. A timber bridge of this nature could only support comparatively light vehicles. This is an excellent location for a bridge.



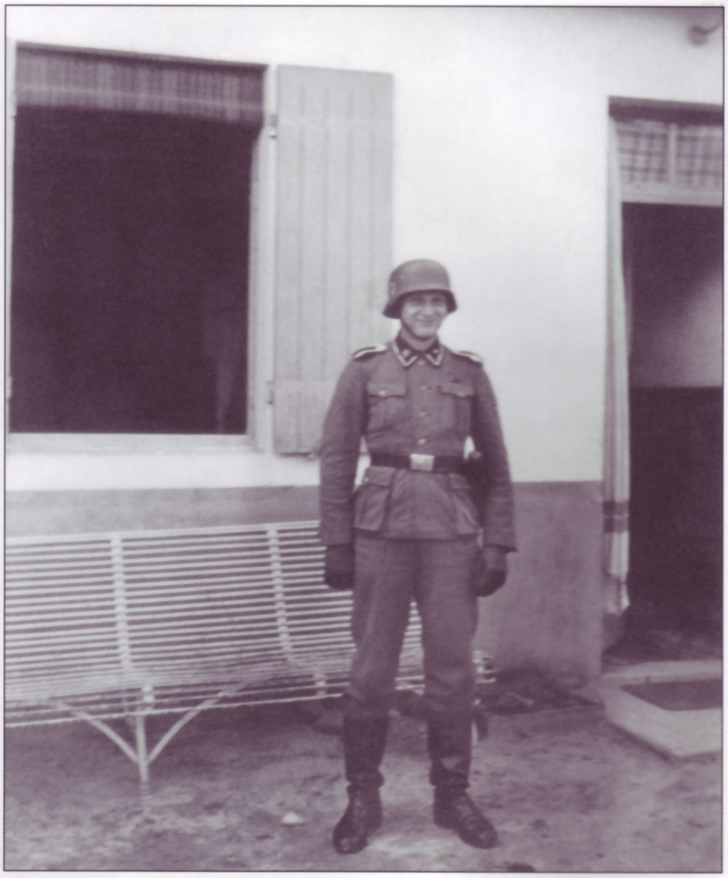
The Standard of "Totenkopf" Division's 2.Totenkopf-Infanterie-Regimen heads the troop column. Such Standards were influenced by those used b Roman legions. The eagle is gold, the wreath silver has gold binding ribbons silver-edged black swastika, and the death head bar is black with silve edging, skull, and Roman numbers (The other regiments were identified b "I" and "III." The banner is red with a silver-edged white disc with a black an silver swastika. "Deutschland Erwache" (Germany Awaken) is inscribed i white. The staff and crosspiece are black with silver fittings. Two SS-Untersturmführer, equivalent to Heeres Leutnant, escort the standar bearer, an enlisted man.



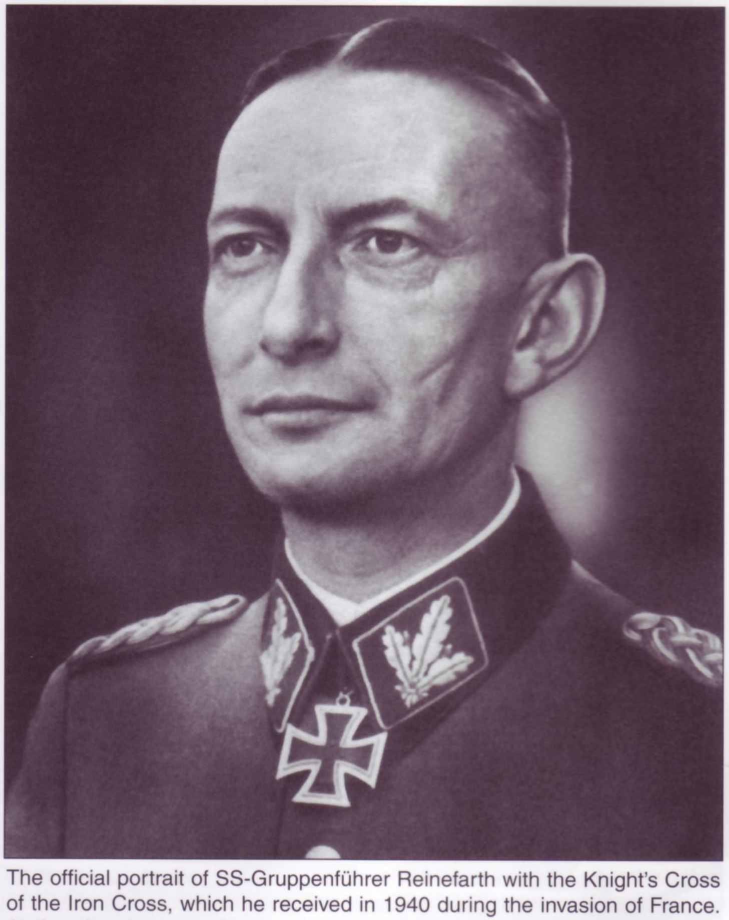
Two SS-Unterscharführer and an SS-Sturmmann (lower left) pose for a photograph in a barracks window. Waffen-SS non-commissioned officers, collectively known as SS-Unterführer (junior leaders), included the ranks of SS-Unterscharführer to SS-Sturmscharführer. They were identified as NCOs by 9mm wide silver or gray braid around the edge of their tunic collars. This tradition goes back to Imperial Army days and helped identify NCOs on the battlefield and within march formations.



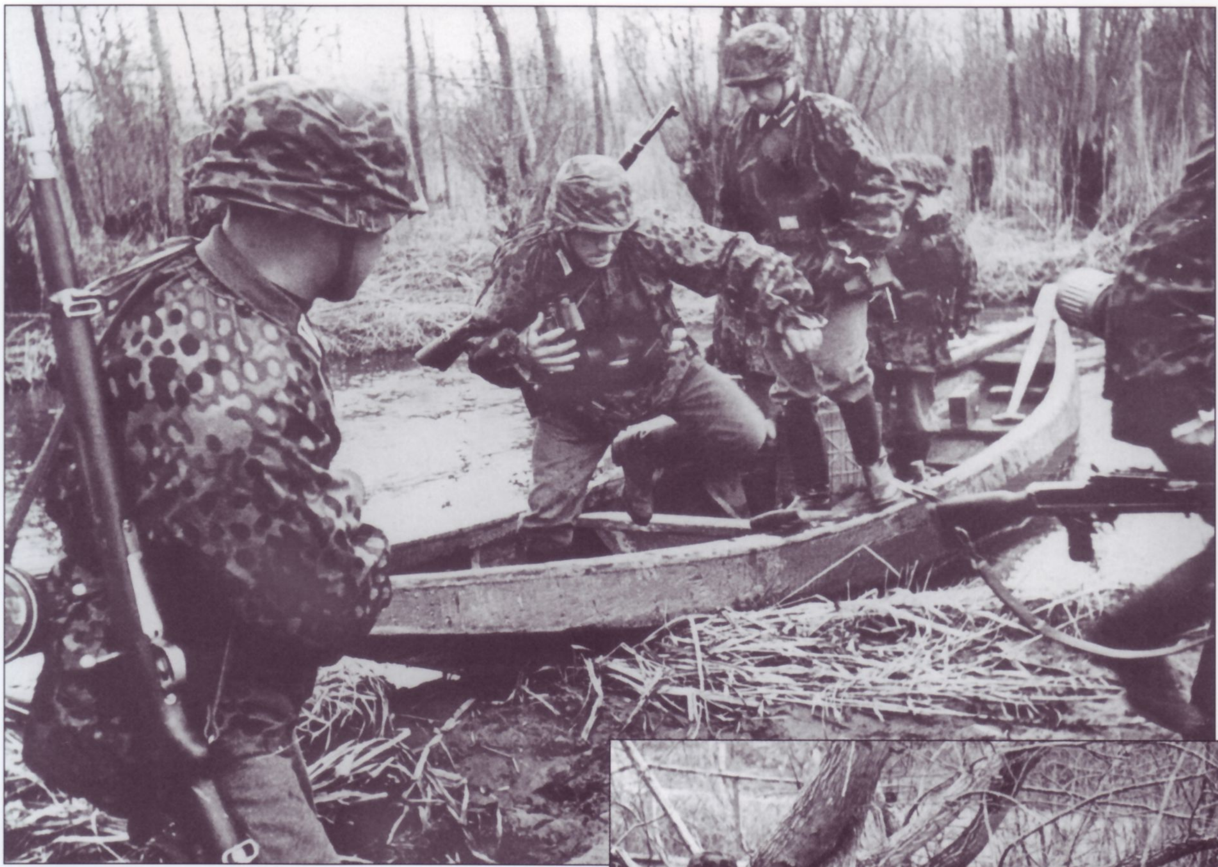
These enlisted men of 2.Totenkopf-Infanterie-Regiment wear early style shoulder straps with pointed rather than rounded ends and an embroidered white "2." White identified infantry in both the Heer and Waffen-SS. This early shoulder strap was not edged with Waffenfarbe (arm of service color) piping as found on rounded end straps. The officer in the truck is an SS-Hauptsturmführer, equivalent to a Heeres Oberleutnant.



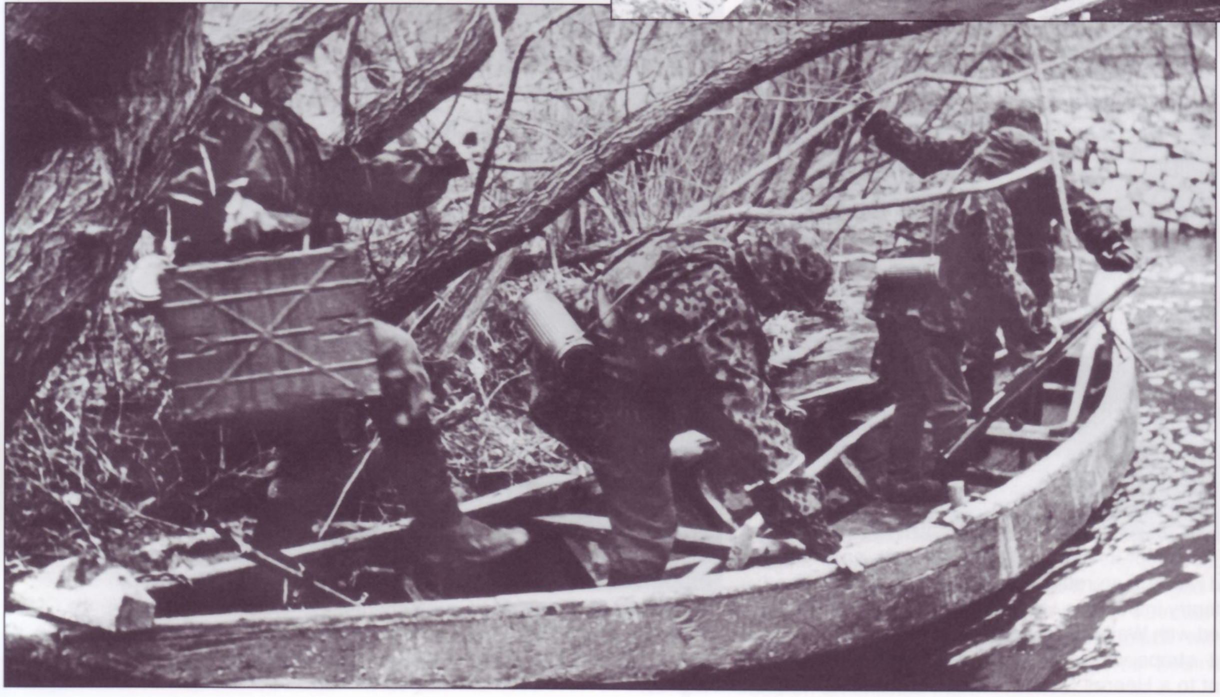
An SS-Unterscharführer was typically a squad leader—Scharführer. He was equivalent to a corporal in Western armies. He is wearing the walking out uniform and is armed with a 9mm pistol. Besides the P08 Luger and P38 Walther, various impounded and captured pistols from other countries were issued.



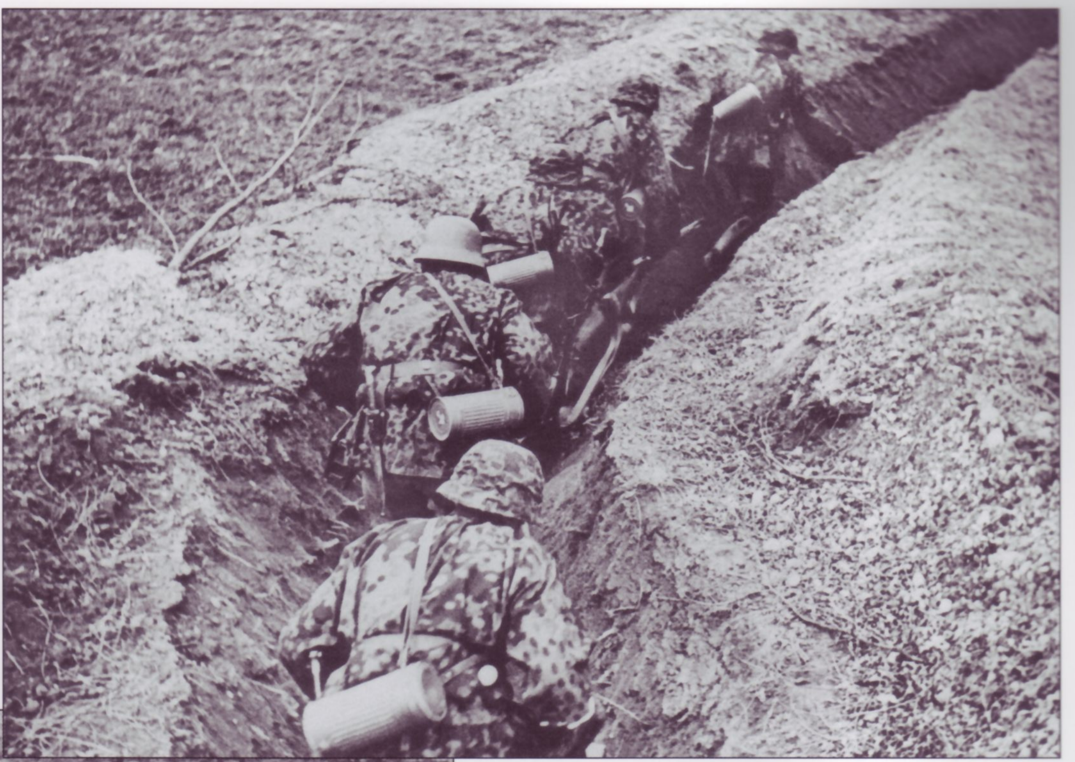
The official portrait of SS-Gruppenführer Reinefarth with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, which he received in 1940 during the invasion of France. At that time he served as a platoon commander in the Army's Infanterie-Regiment 337. He soon transferred to Waffen-SS and quickly rose in rank.

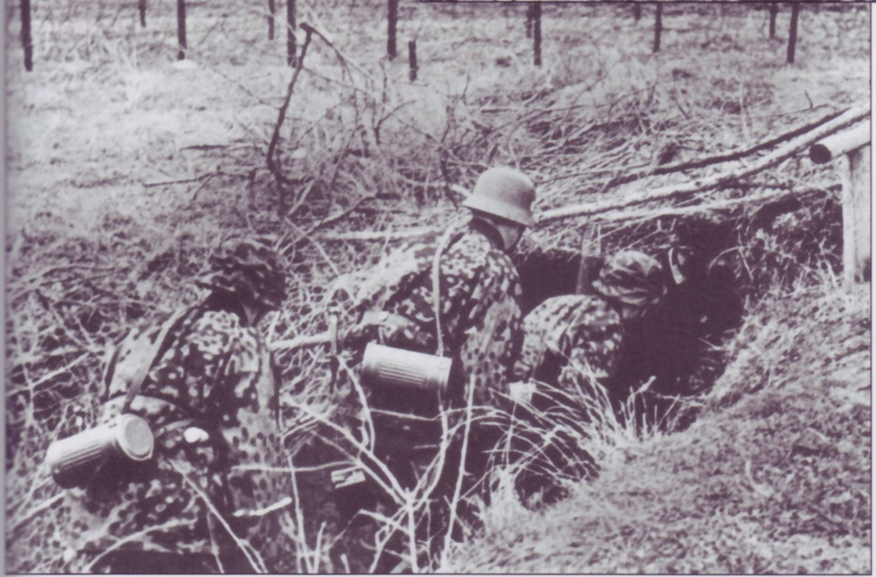


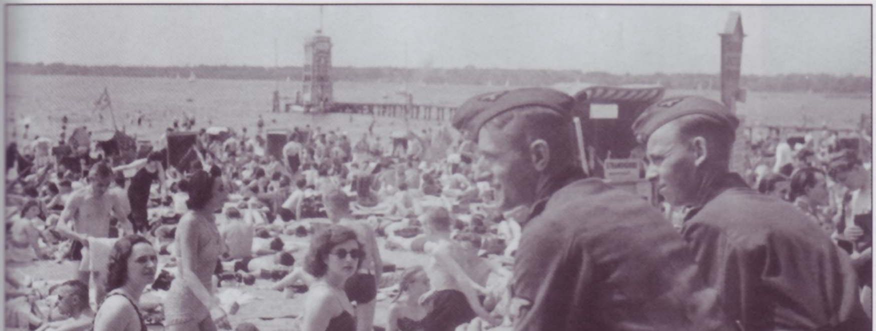
A rifle group from the SS-Polizei-Division, during training in Germany, 1940. Camouflage uniform items, which were field tested in 1937 and 1938, began to be issued on a limited basis in late 1938. The first items were helmet covers, shelter quarters, and facemasks, with camouflage smocks issued in 1939. There were a wide variety of patterns and color combinations. The group is armed with two MG26 machine-guns; one man carries a case of ten Stg24 stick grenades. The steel grenade case is field gray. Other men carry machine-gun ammunition containers of the same color. Intended for a 250-round MG34 belt, it held six 30-round magazines. The riflemen are armed with the Czechoslovak Mauser 7.92mm vz.16/33 rifle, which the Germans called the Gew33(t). While the Germans designated it a rifle it was actually a carbine and shorter than the standard Kar98k carbine.



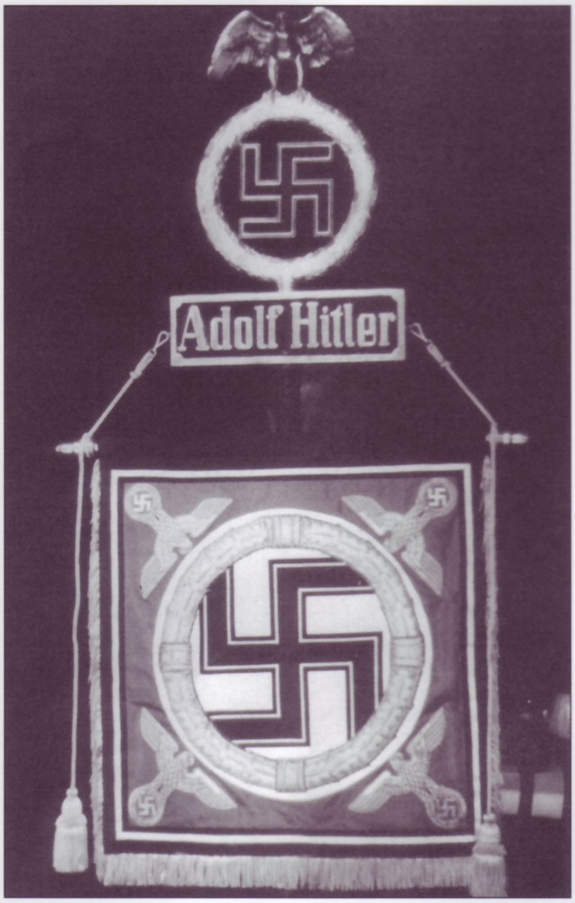
A rifle group conducts a training exercise to learn how to clear trenches. The predominantly green camouflage smocks were rather conspicuous against turned soil and dead vegetation. Note the barbed wire picket posts and entanglement beyond the trenches in the second photograph.



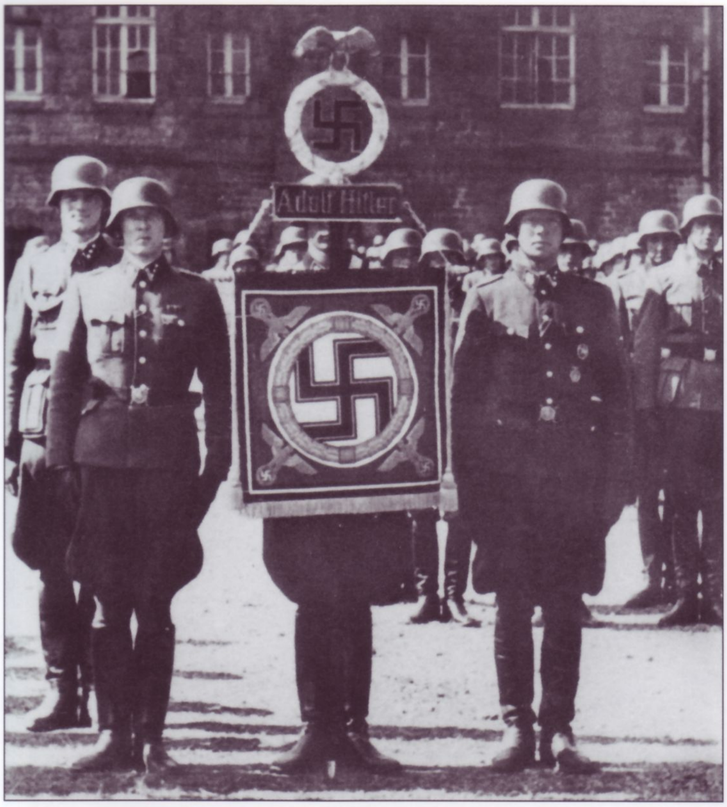




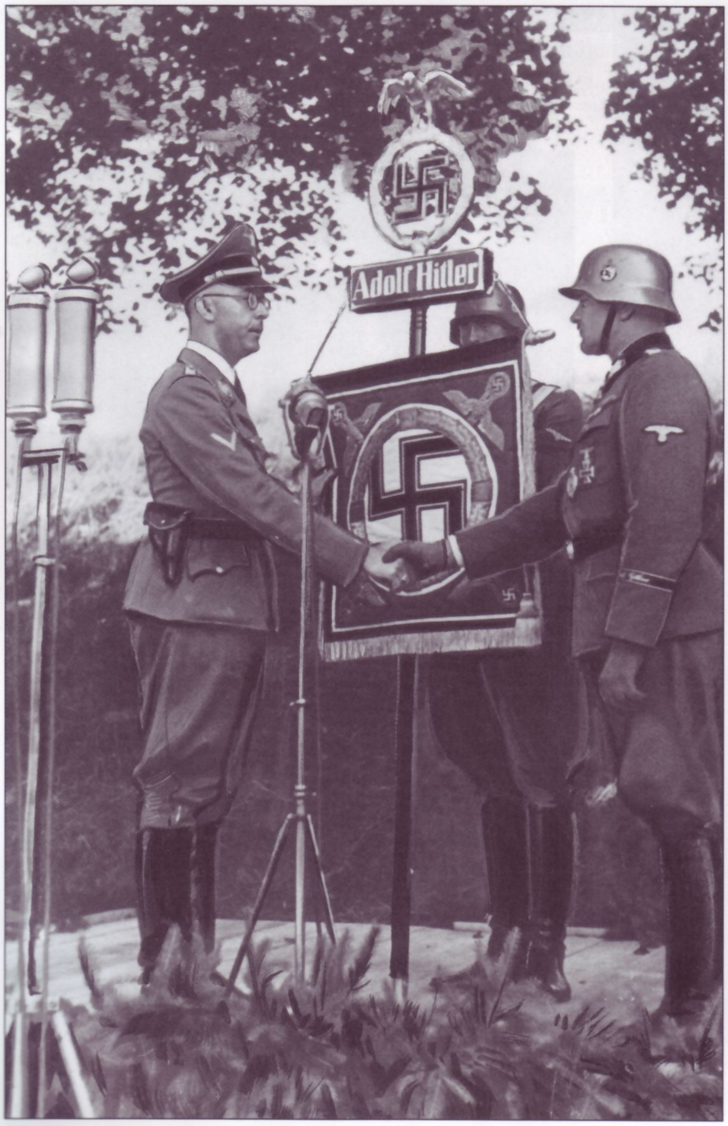
Two Waffen-SS soldiers enjoy their leave at Berlin's most popular beach on the Wannsee, June 1940. They wear their bayonets, referred to as side-arms (Seitengerwehr) in the German armed forces, with decorative colored knot cords indicating their battalion and company.



The "LAH" was presented with its Standard after the defeat of France, where it had shed its first blood. It employs the Nazi Party colors: black, red and white, plus gold eagle and wreath.

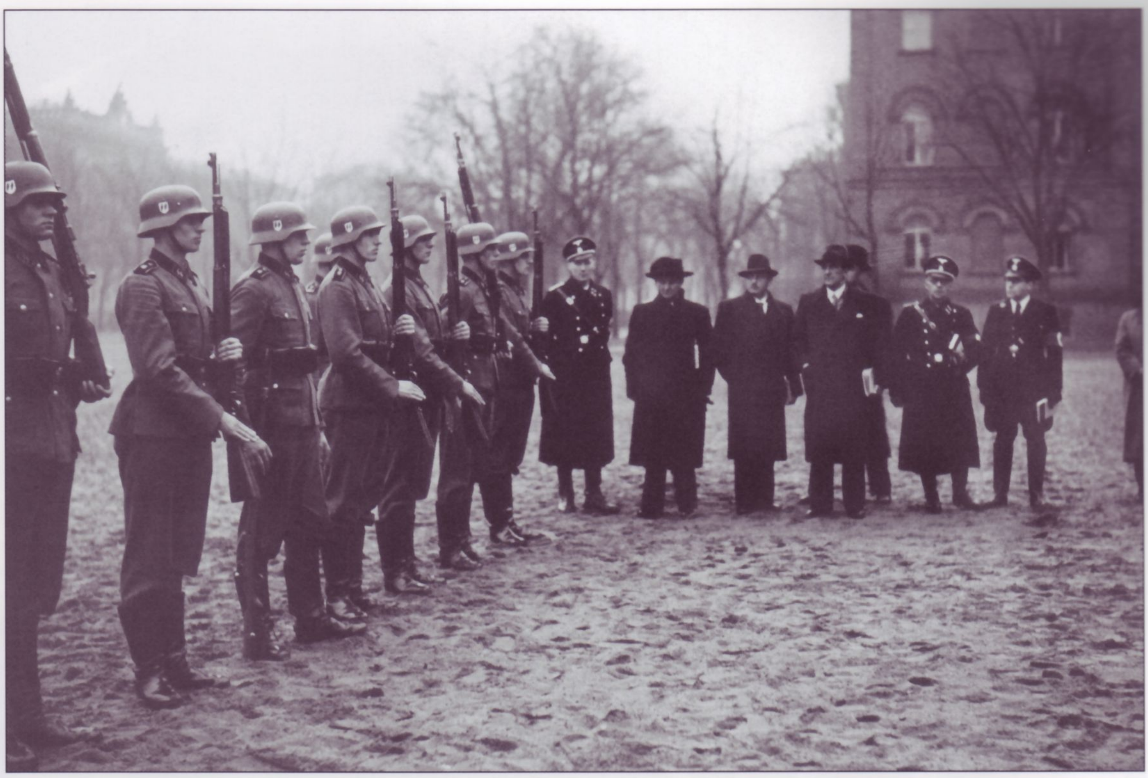


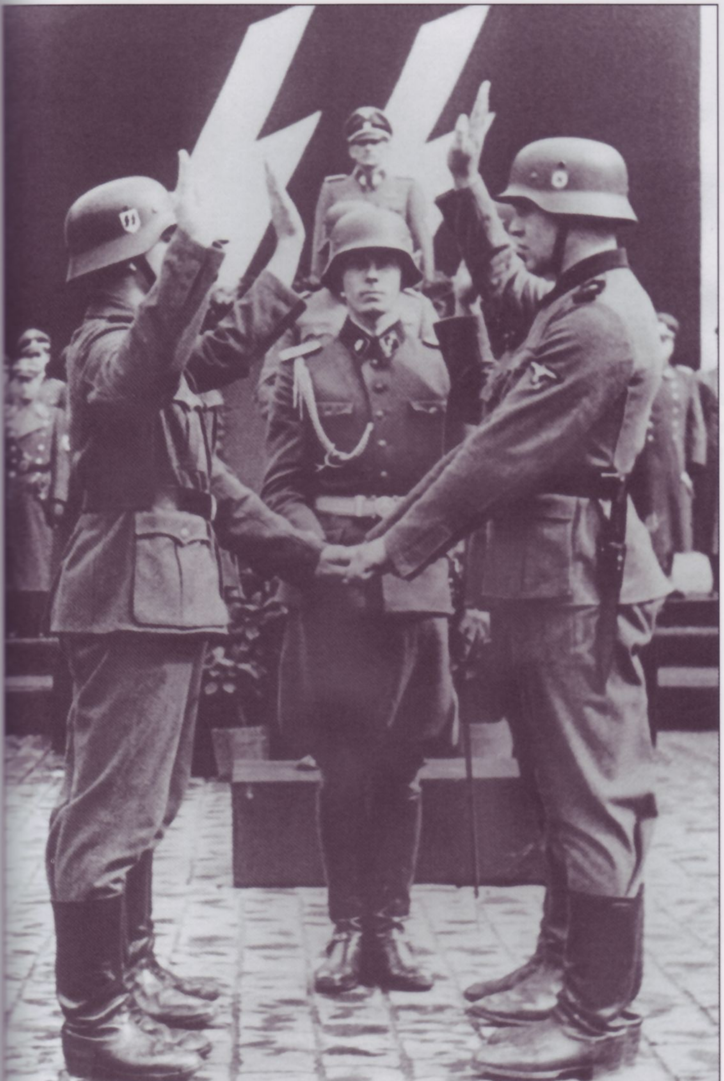
The color party of the "LAH", composed of only officers, prepared for inspection by Himmler in Metz, just after the unit received their Standard. The Standard never left the unit's headquarters and therefore was never risked in combat.



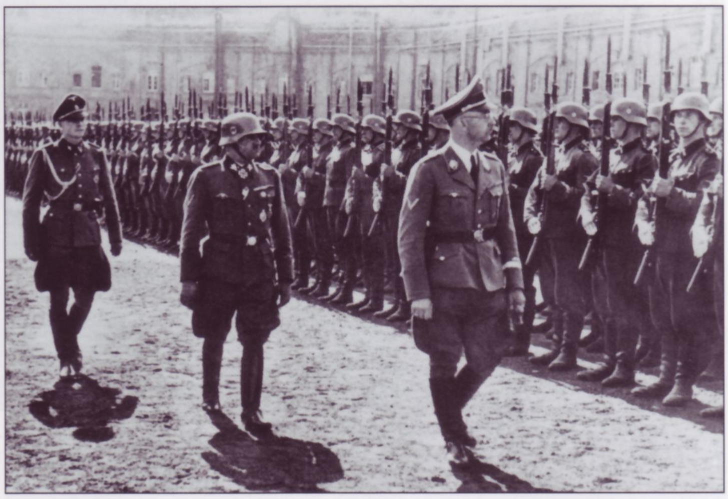
Himmler presents the "LAH" Standard to Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich in September 1940.

Dr. Karl Roos of the Reichsministry of the Interior, and other officials watch "LAH" soldiers perform a rifle drill routine, November 1940. Dignitaries frequently visited the "LAH" Kaserne in Berlin where they were entertained by exhibitions of the Waffen-SS's military skills.

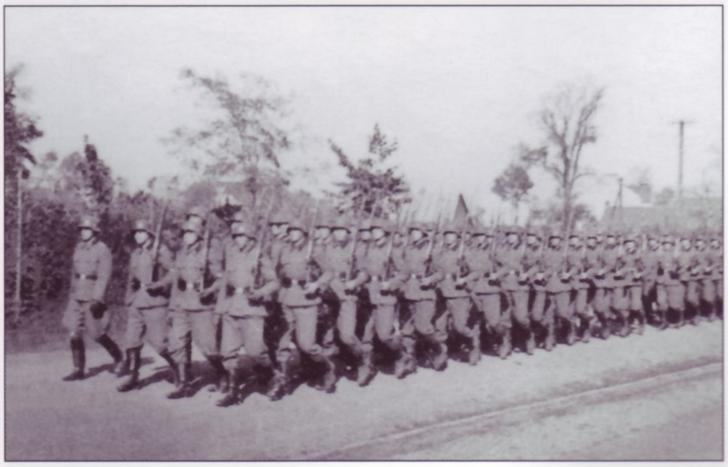




Recruits of an SS-Totenkopf-Standarte swear their oath to the Führer and the Fatherland in Prague, September 1940. The unit was stationed in the Czech capital since the spring of 1939.



Reichsführer der SS Himmler inspects an "LAH" formation after the presentation of their new Standard. To Dietrich's right rear, is the infamous Hauptsturmführer Joachim Peiper, later one of the unit's Knight's Cross winners.



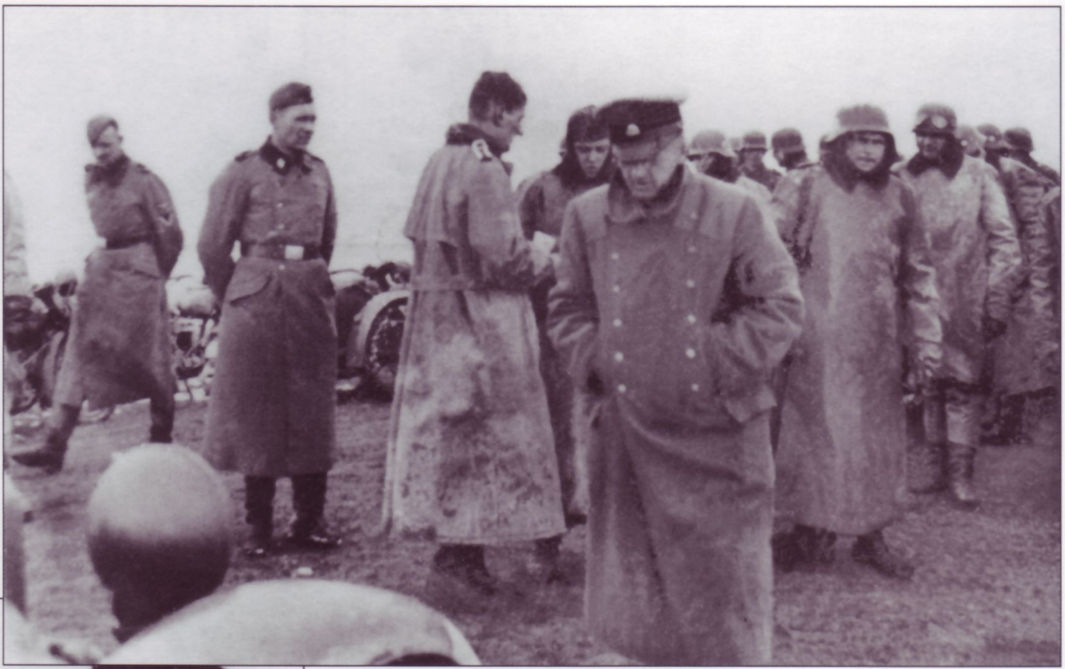
From 1940 into 1941, the Waffen-SS was expanded, with new and existing units being put through an extensive combat training program. Here a rifle company undertakes a road march, as part of the process of instilling discipline and increasing physical endurance.

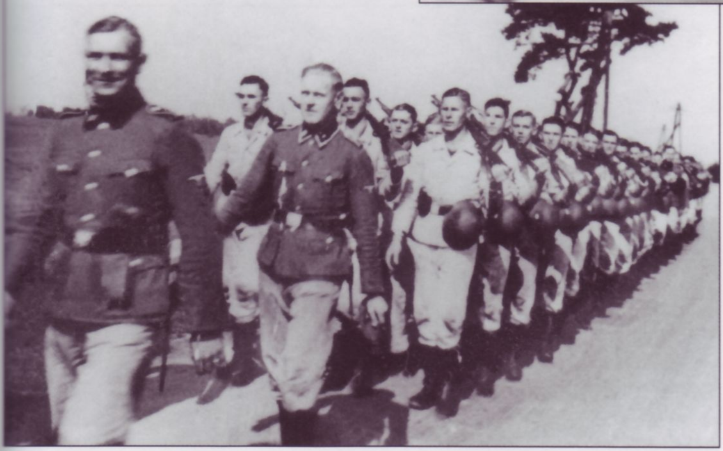
The Waffen-SS made some use of messenger dogs, shown here in training. The apocryphal stories of SS officer cadets (or Hitler Youth, depending on the version) being given pups to raise, and then being ordered to personally kill them to show their dedication to orders, are myths.

An SS-Oberscharfürer lectures to his troops. His youth typifies the rapid promotions from within the NCO ranks, of veterans, as the Waffen-SS was expanded. To the left is an Unterführer Anwärter (NCO aspirant), identifiable by the 9mm braid loop at the base of his shoulder straps.

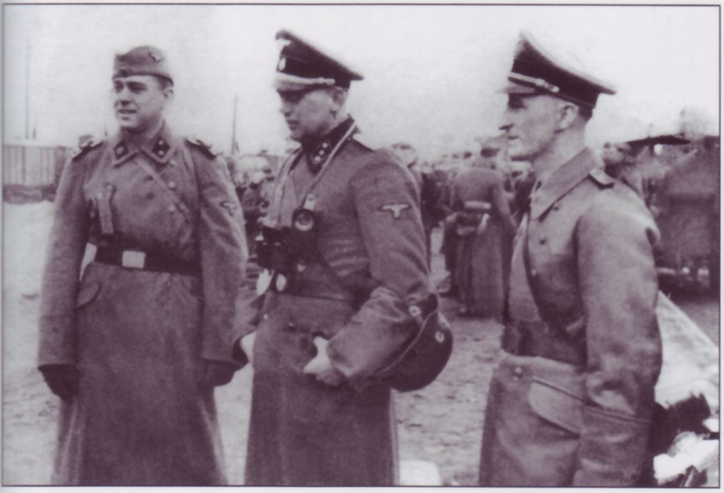
Waffen-SS troops take a break during a road march, possibly in Czechoslovakia.

Orders are issued during a winter training exercise. Most of the troops wear field gray greatcoats, but the SS-Unterscharfürer in the center wears the motorcycle protective suit (Kradschutzmantel). The suit's skirt could be wrapped around the legs and secured by buttons.

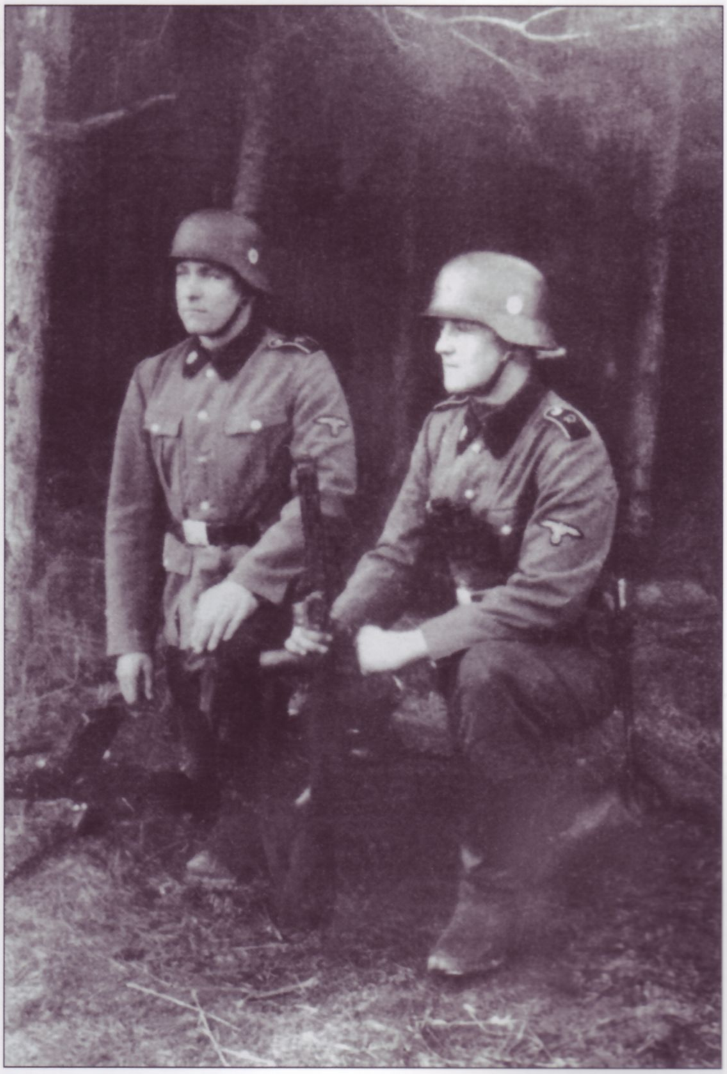




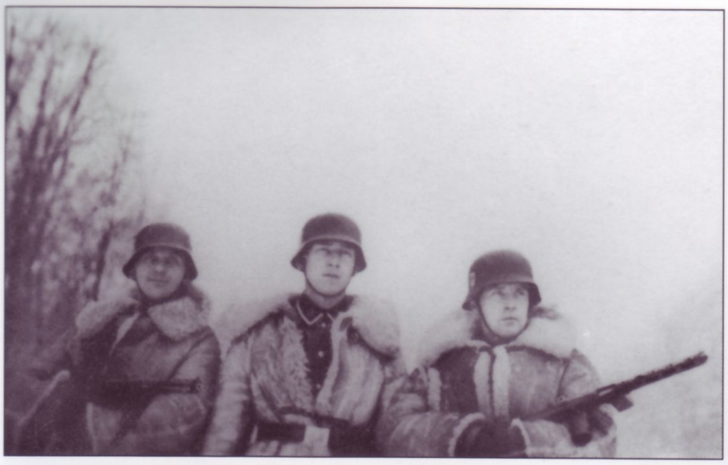
Another group of SS soldiers participate in a road march, during training. The troops wear off-white cotton denim drill uniforms while the NCOs wear drill trousers with field gray tunics. In a rare concession to comfort on a hot day, they have been permitted to carry their helmets slung by their chinstraps over their cartridge pouches.



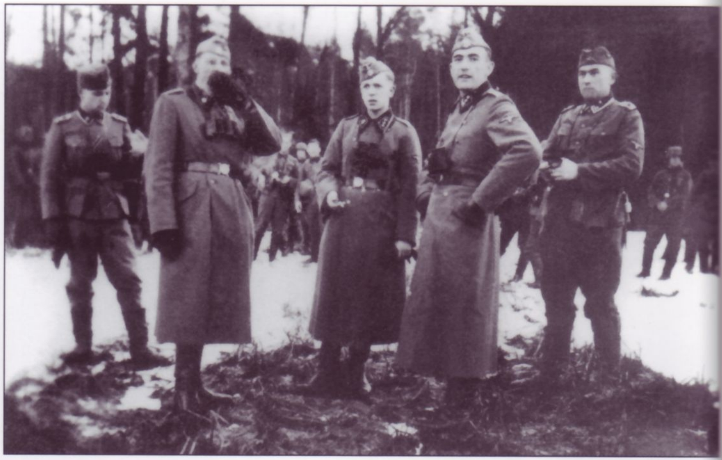
Three forms of greatcoat being worn during a winter exercise. The SS-Oberscharführer to the left wears the enlisted man's greatcoat (Mantel). He wears slip-on bands over the shoulder straps on which the unit device (unidentifiable here) is affixed. When on the front lines, these would be removed to prevent identification of his unit. In the center, the SS-Untersturmführer wears the high-quality officer greatcoat (Führermantel). The SS-Untersturmführer to the right wears the extremely expensive leather greatcoat (Ledermantel). Only rank shoulder straps were required to be worn on this garment. All three greatcoats are field gray in color.



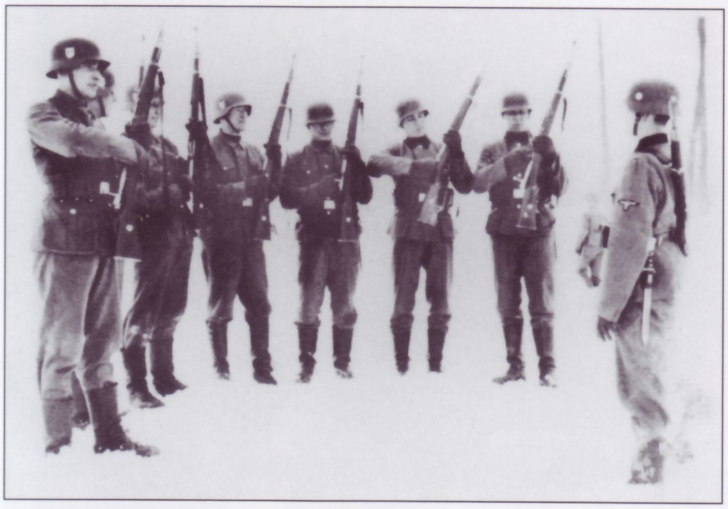
Two members of SS-Standarte "Deutschland" pause during a training exercise. The man to the right is armed with a 9mm Erma machine-pistol. The Waffen-SS used a wide variety of machine-pistols (sub-machine-guns) as most production of the MP38 and MP40 were destined to the Army.



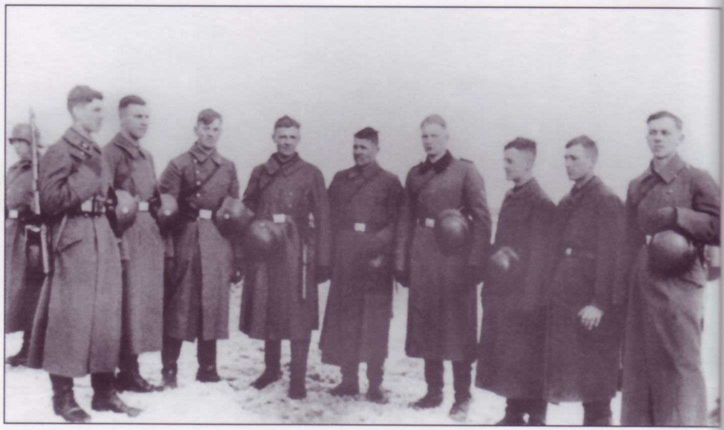
Some units were provided with white sheepskin-lined coats worn with the tanned leather side facing out. Note the large protective collars. The man to the right is armed with a 9mm Erma machine-pistol.



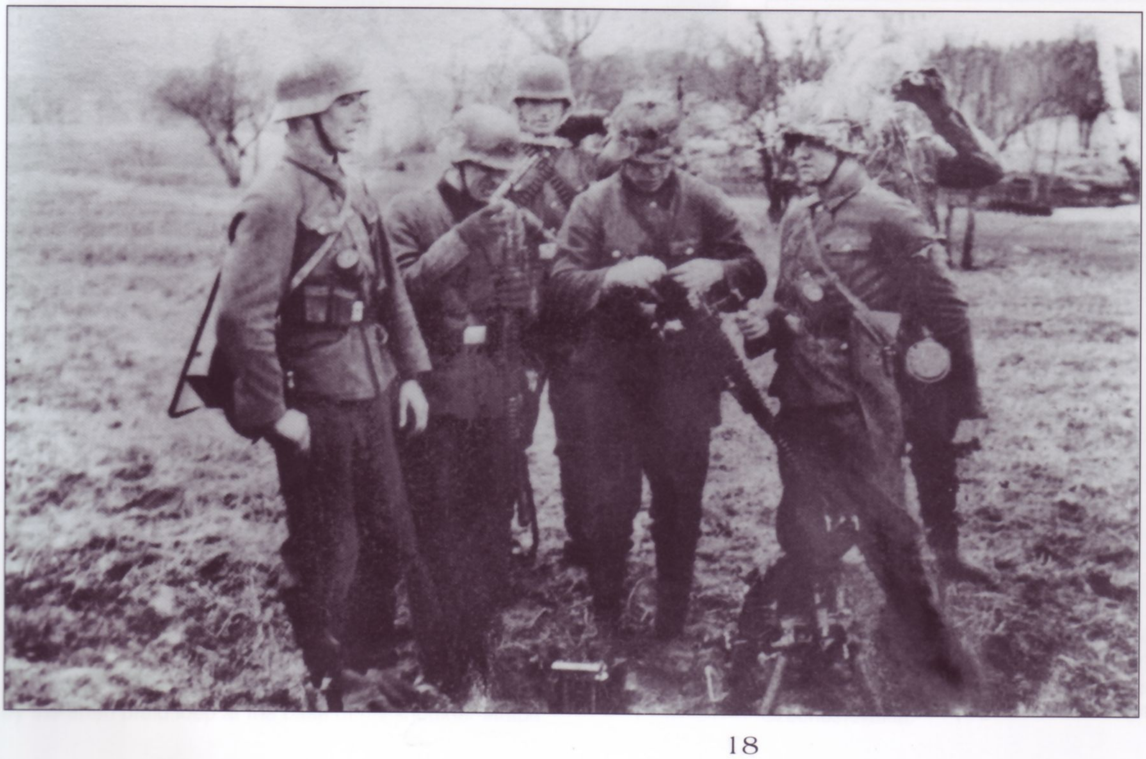
A group of company officers and NCOs in front of their formation. It was common for senior NCOs to command platoons owing to the officer shortage caused by the rapid expansion of the Waffen-SS. From left to right these individuals are: SS-Oberscharführer (platoon leader), SS-Untersturmführer (platoon leader), SS-Untersturmführer (platoon leader), SS-Obersturmführer (company leader), and SS-Hauptscharführer (equivalent to a US first sergeant).



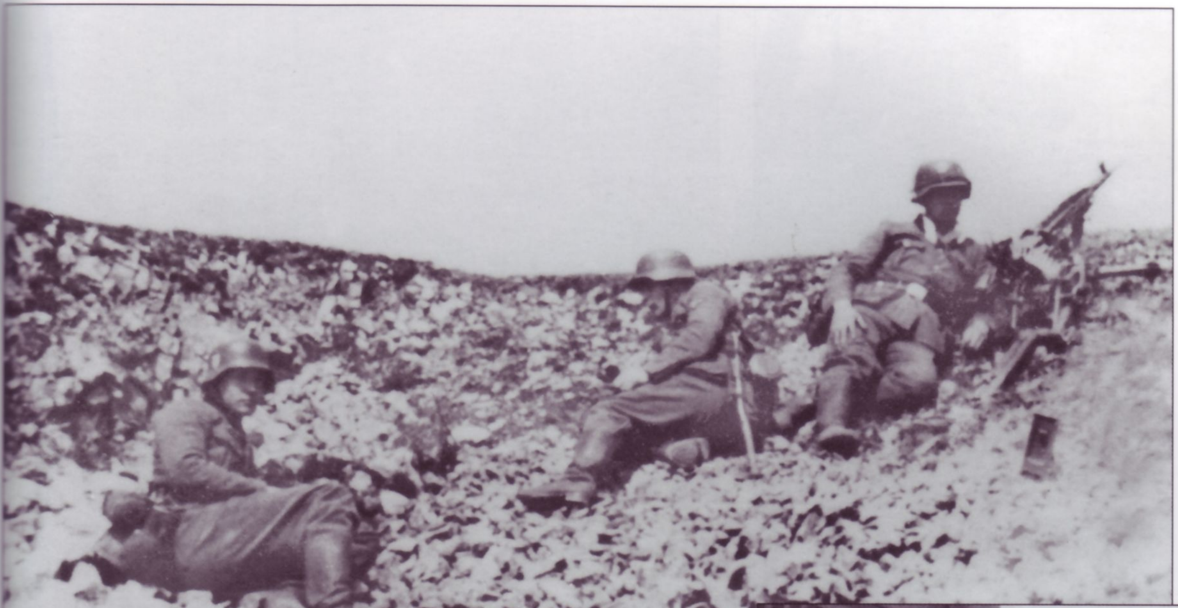
A rifle group in training clears its 7.92mm Gew33(t) rifles after completing range firing. It appears to be a mild winter day as they wear no greatcoats, although they do wear their gloves.



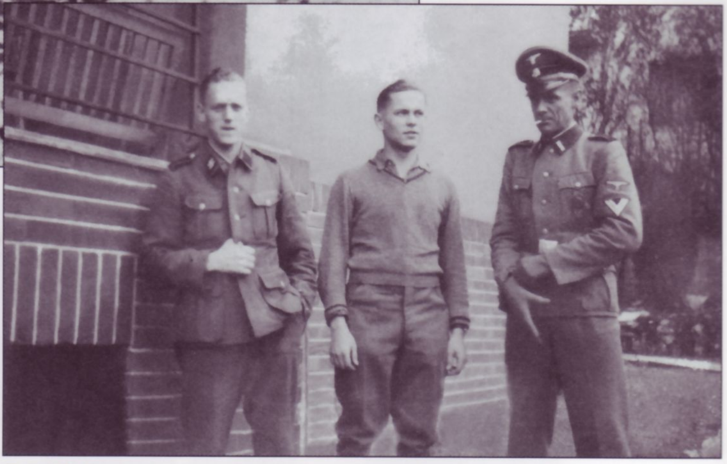
A rifle group during a winter field exercise. The weather must be mild, as they wear no headgear and some do not bother to wear their field gray wool knit gloves. The 9mm Erma, carried by the man on the far left, saw little use; it was mainly intended for export sales. Most SS units were armed with the Bergmann MP28 and other machine-pistols impounded in occupied countries.



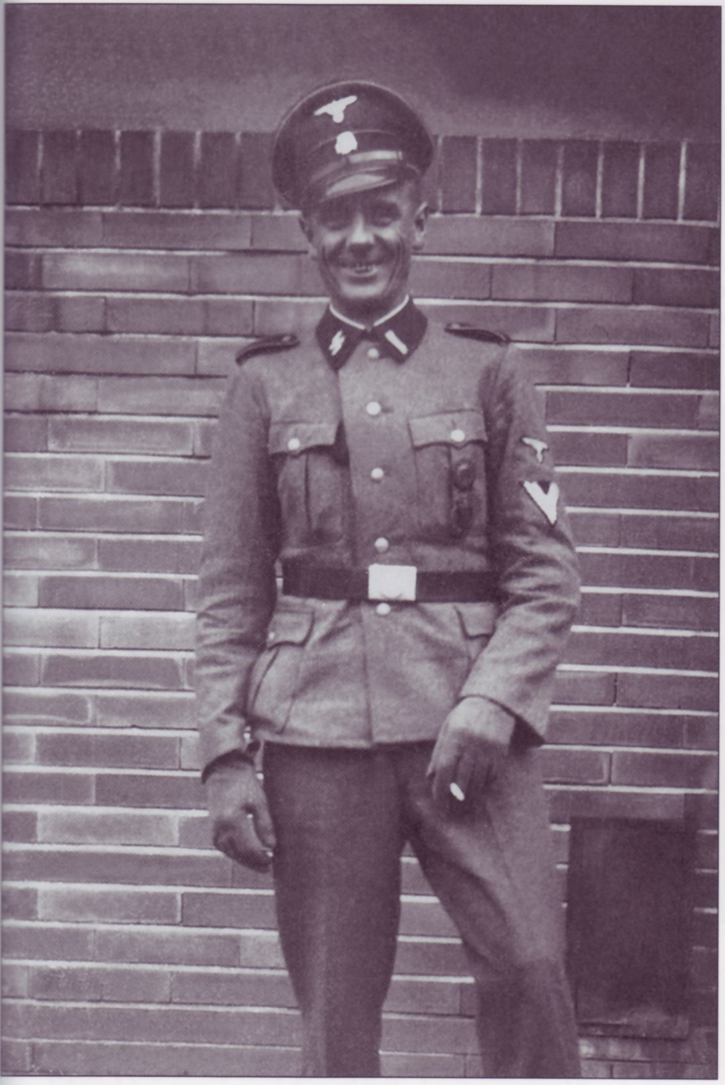
An 8cm GrW34 mortar troop with its weapon barely discernable to the right. Some troop members have straw secured in the helmet bands. The crewman to the left carries a steel pack frame for the mortar's base plate.



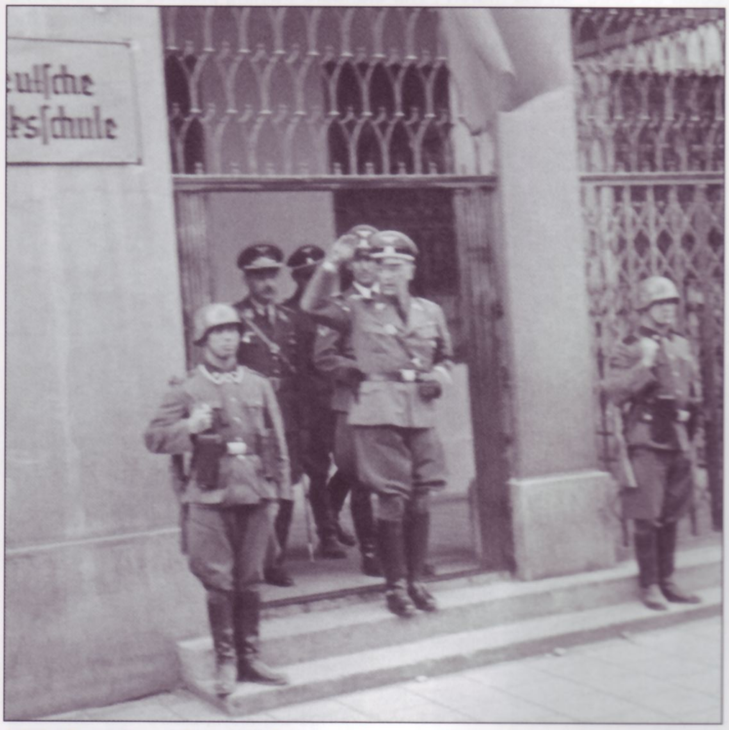
A heavy machine-gun troop during tactical training exercise has set up its Czechoslovak-made 7.92mm vz.37, which they called the MG37(t). The Waffen-SS used large numbers of Czechoslovak-made weapons, which fortuitously were chambered for the German 7.92mm round. Positioned below the lip of a ravine, they will push the weapon up over the lip when they go into action.



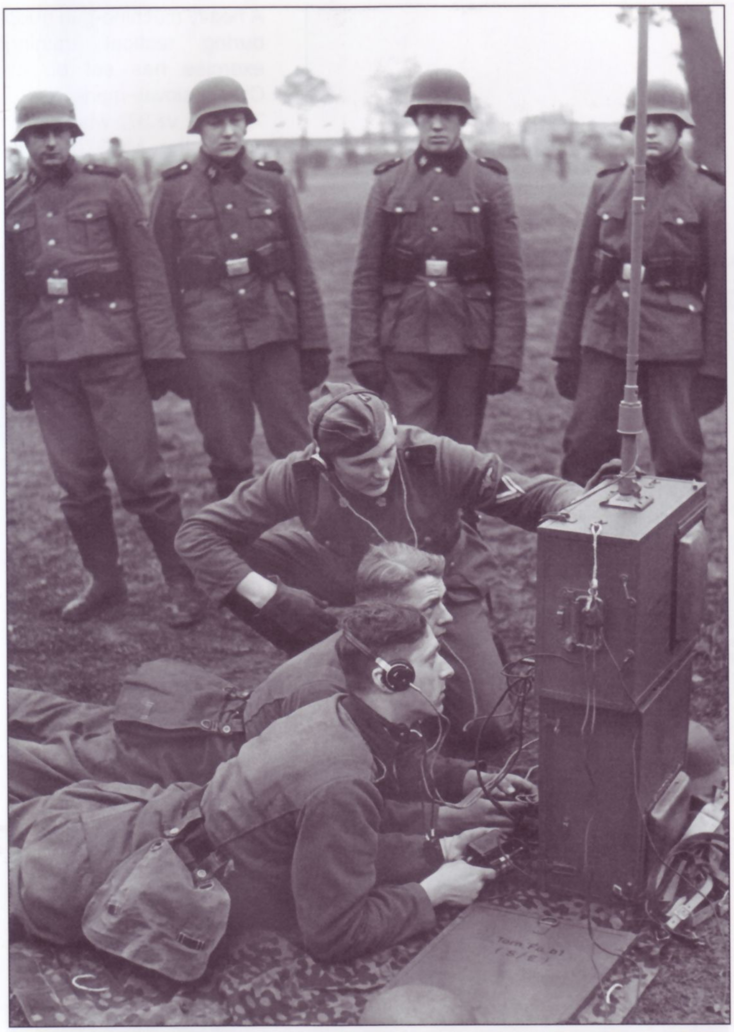
The SS-Rottenführer to the right pulls on his non-issue leather gloves. The man in the center wears a non-issue field gray sweater. The issue sweater was of a heavier knit and long at the waist.



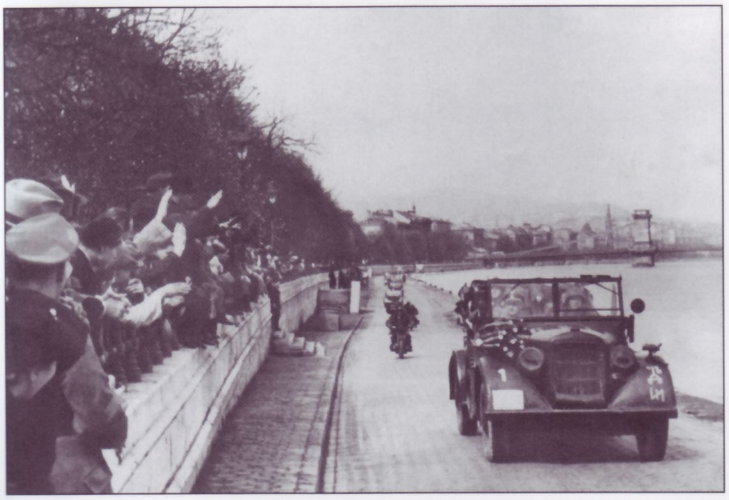
The same SS-Rottenführer in his walking out uniform. On his right breast is the black Wound Badge indicating one or two wounds. The collar is dark bottle green indicating it was issued from Army stocks. SS-issue tunics had field gray collars.



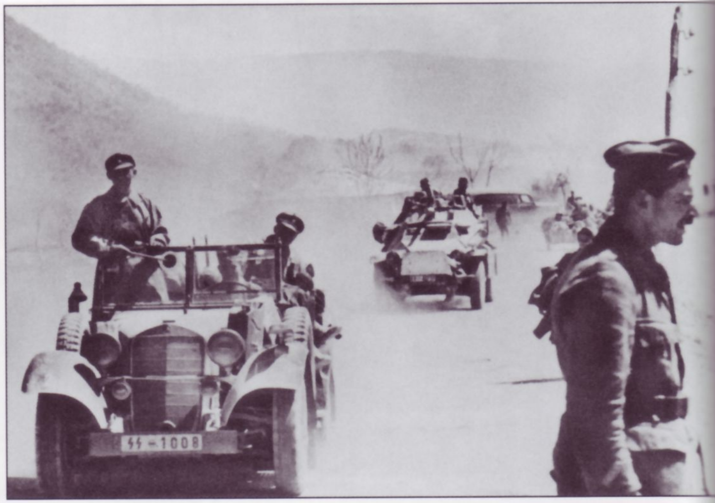
NSDAP (National-Socialist German Worker's Party, or Nazi Party) leaders exit a building in Tarnow, Poland, in 1940. The two Waffen-SS guards of a Totenkopf unit are armed with 9mm MP28/II machine-pistols and equipped with three-pocket pouches of brown leather for the 32-round magazines.



Radiomen undergo training with a Tornisterfunkgerät b1 (Torn. Fu. b1 (S/E), or "pack radio"), a widely used portable tactical radio, in March of 1941. The radio's upper and lower halves were each carried by a soldier on a specially designed back-pack frame, and when connected to each other via cables, could be used "on the march". The standard training practice was for some students to operate the equipment under the tutorage of an instructor as the others watched; then they would take their turn.

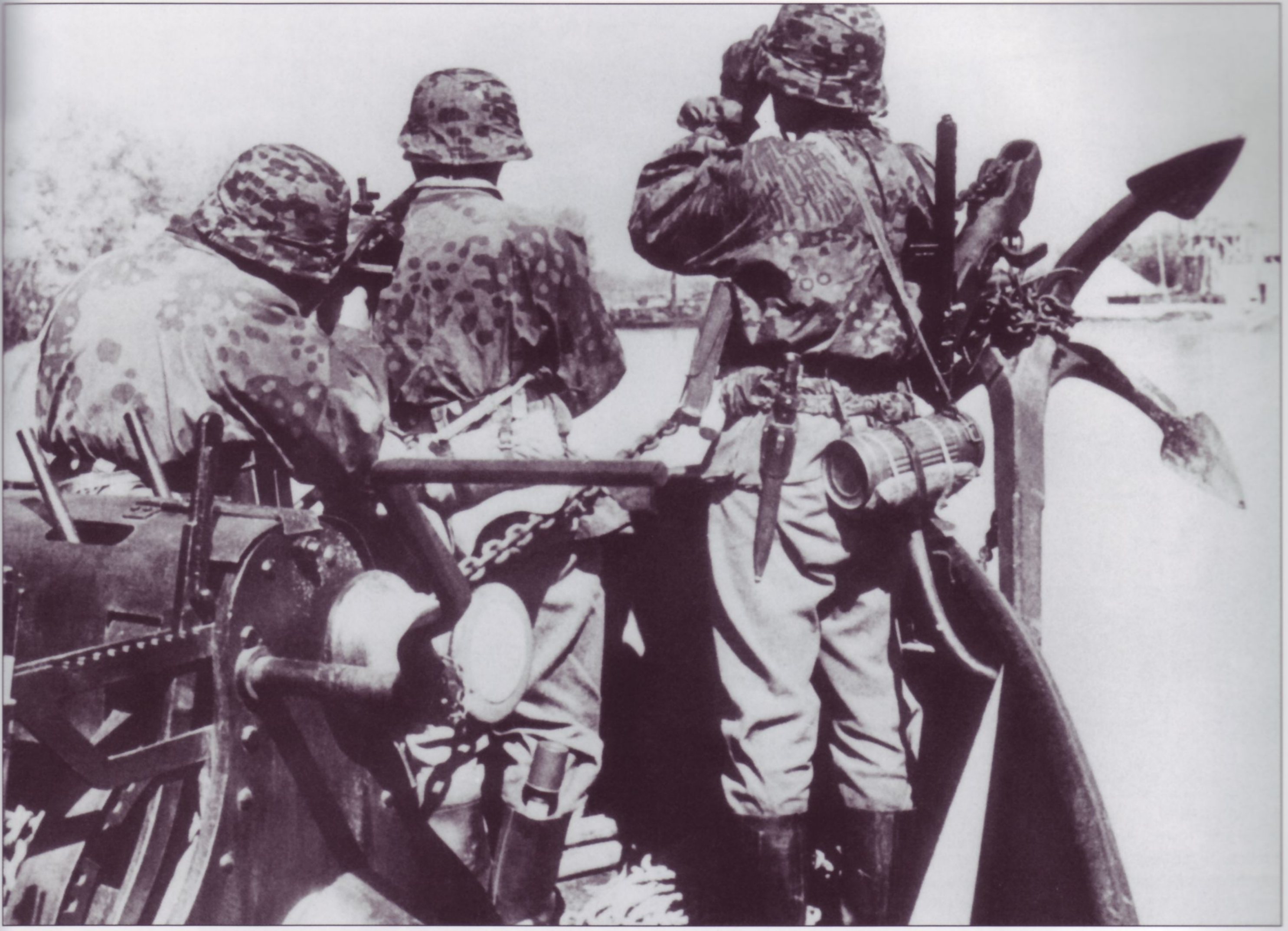


A Horch staff car of the SS-Division "Reich" passes through Budapest, Hungary in April 1941 en-route to Greece. The Horch bears numerous tactical markings including the inverted "Y" sign of a motorized Werfer (rocket) artillery unit and the divisional emblem, the "Wolfsangel" (Wolf's Hook). The division was designated "Deutschland" on 1 April 1940, having previously been called the SS-Verfügungs-Division. Since the division's name was confused with the title of one of its component regiments, it was re-designated SS-Division (mot.) "Reich" on 21 December 1940. It was again re-designated SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Das Reich" on 9 November 1942.

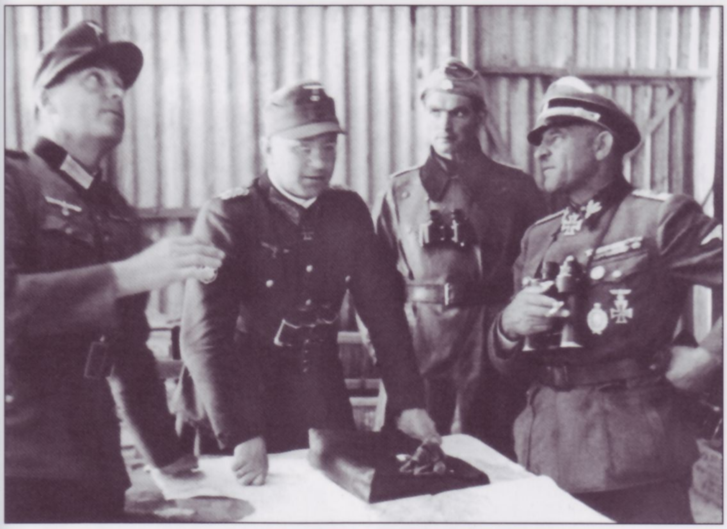


The Kfz.15 medium cross-country car was one of the most common models used by the Waffen-SS. It is followed by an Sd.Kfz.222 armed with a 2cm automatic gun and a 7.92mm machine-gun.

SS-Hauptsturmführer Fritz Klingenberg captured Belgrade with only 11 men under his command. They crossed the Danube by boat and with help of the German military-attaché, accepted the surrender from the city's Mayor. The action provided a valuable propaganda claim for the Germans and Klingenberg was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. Promoted to SS-Oberführer, Klingenberg was killed on 22 March 1945 while commanding 17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Götz von Berlichingen".

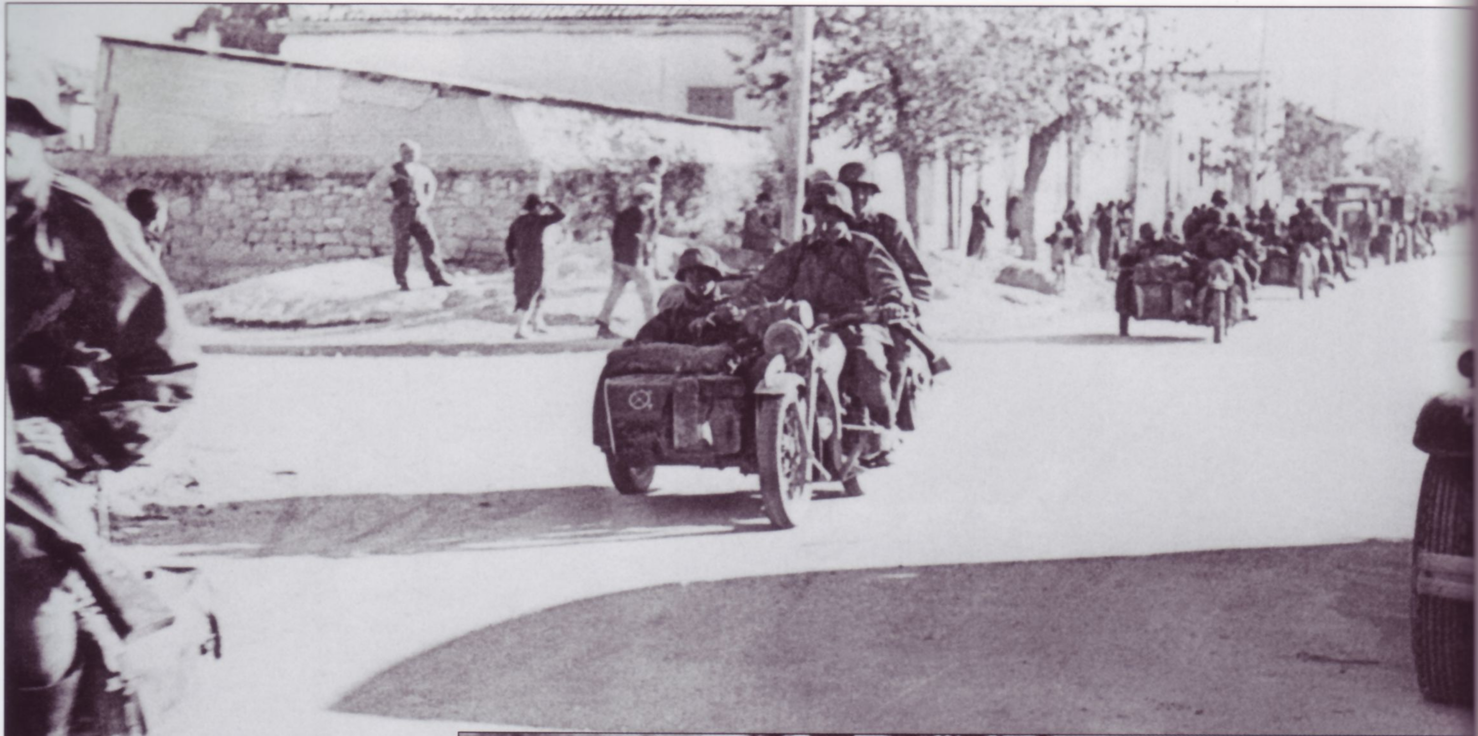


A Waffen-SS unit approaches a Yugoslavian village on the Aegean Sea via a commandeered fishing boat. A 7.92mm MG34 light machine-gun rests on a man's shoulder to serve as a steady platform, should the gunner be ordered to open fire. Note the stick hand grenade in the boot of the man serving as a "mount," the anti-gas sheet pouch strapped to the gasmask canister, and the different patterns of camouflage smocks. It was common for patterns to be mixed in units and for helmet covers to be of a different pattern than the smock.

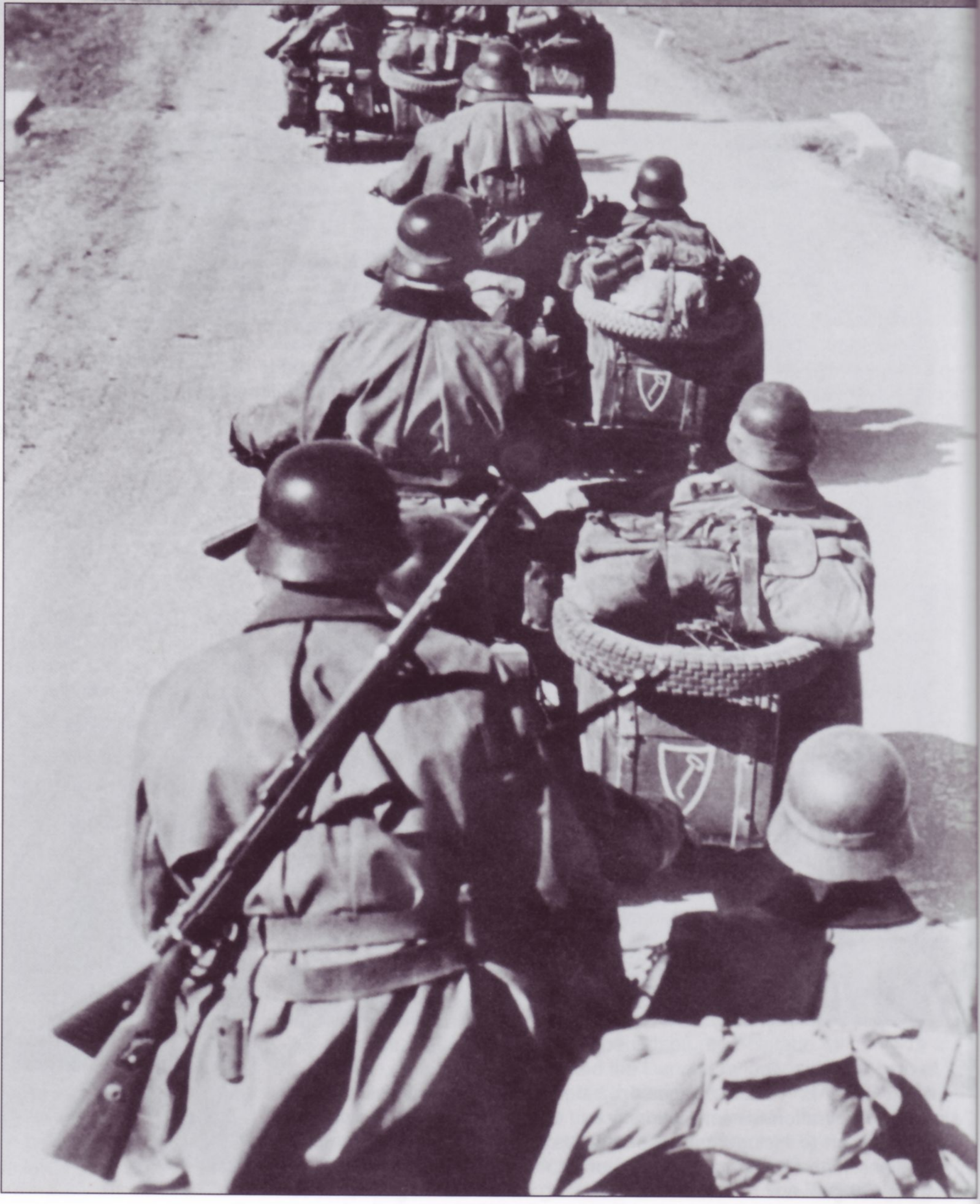


"Sepp" Dietrich discusses the tactical situation with Army officers in Yugoslavia during the German onslaught through the Balkans. The Army general officer is a member of the mountain troops (Gebirgstruppen) as can be seen by his shoulder insignia, just behind the hand of the gesturing officer at left.

A column of "LAH" vehicles jammed up on a road during the Balkans Campaign. The Waffen-SS employed any and all motorized vehicles it could lay its hands on to include captured vehicles and those commandeered from civilians. In the center can be seen an Sd.Kfz.6/2 halftrack mounting a 3.7cm FlaK36 gun.



Motorcycles of an "LAH" unit pass through a Greek town, April 1941. The circular tactical symbol on the bow of the sidecars identifies this vehicle as belonging to a motorcycle rifle battalion (Kradschützen-Abteilung).



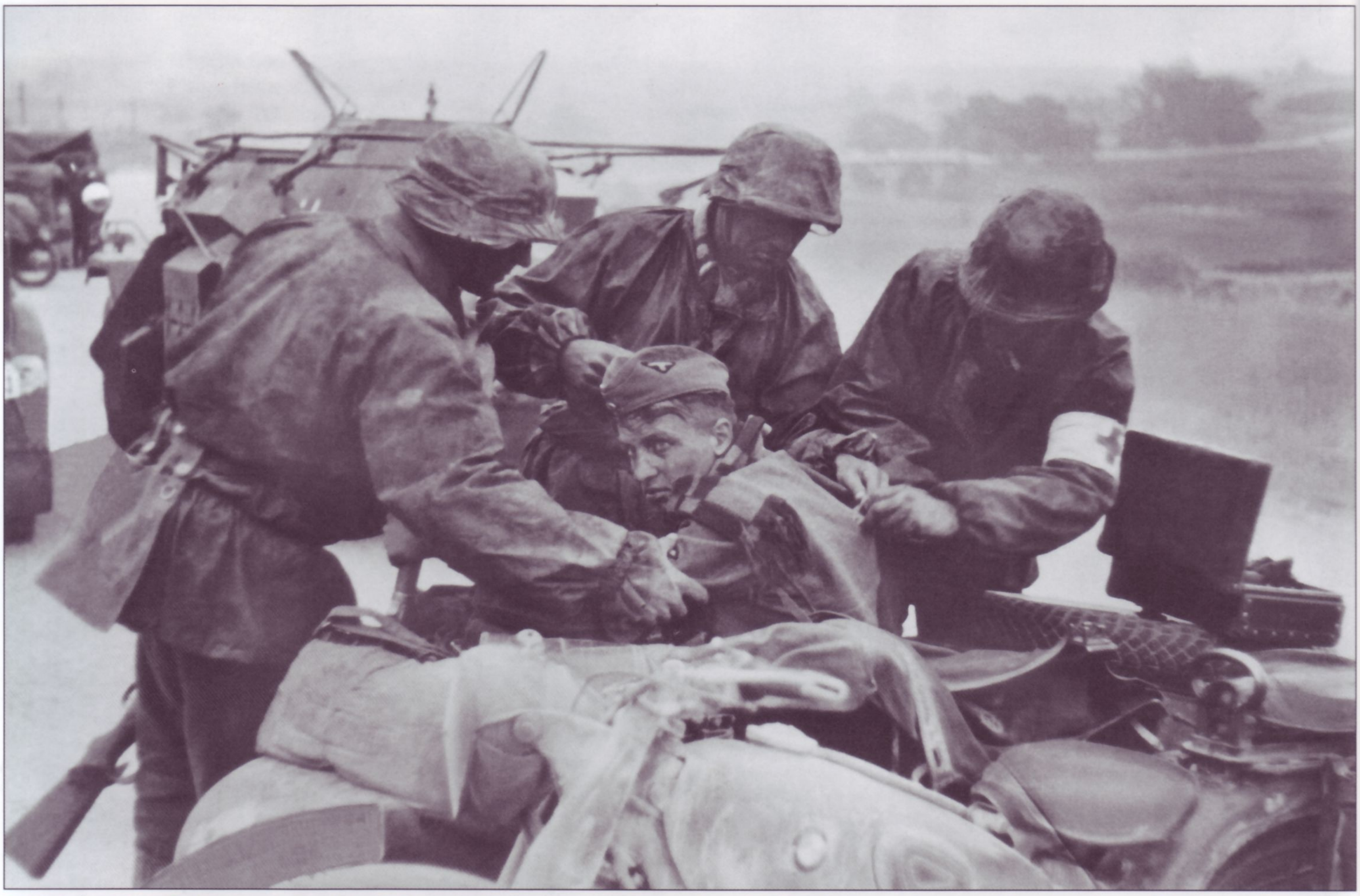
The white "Key-in-Shield" insignia of SS-Division "LAH" is painted on the rear of these motorcycle's sidecars. This design was used until 1942 when a similar insignia with a curved notch on the upper right corner of the shield was adopted. The Kradschützen wear the field gray motorcycle protective suit with a dark green collar. Their gear can be seen attached to the rear of the sidecar.

Greek troops mill around after "LAH" soldiers of a motorcycle reconnaissance unit landed on a Greek island in May of 1941 to accept the garrison's capitulation. Locally commandeered fishing boats were employed for the operation.

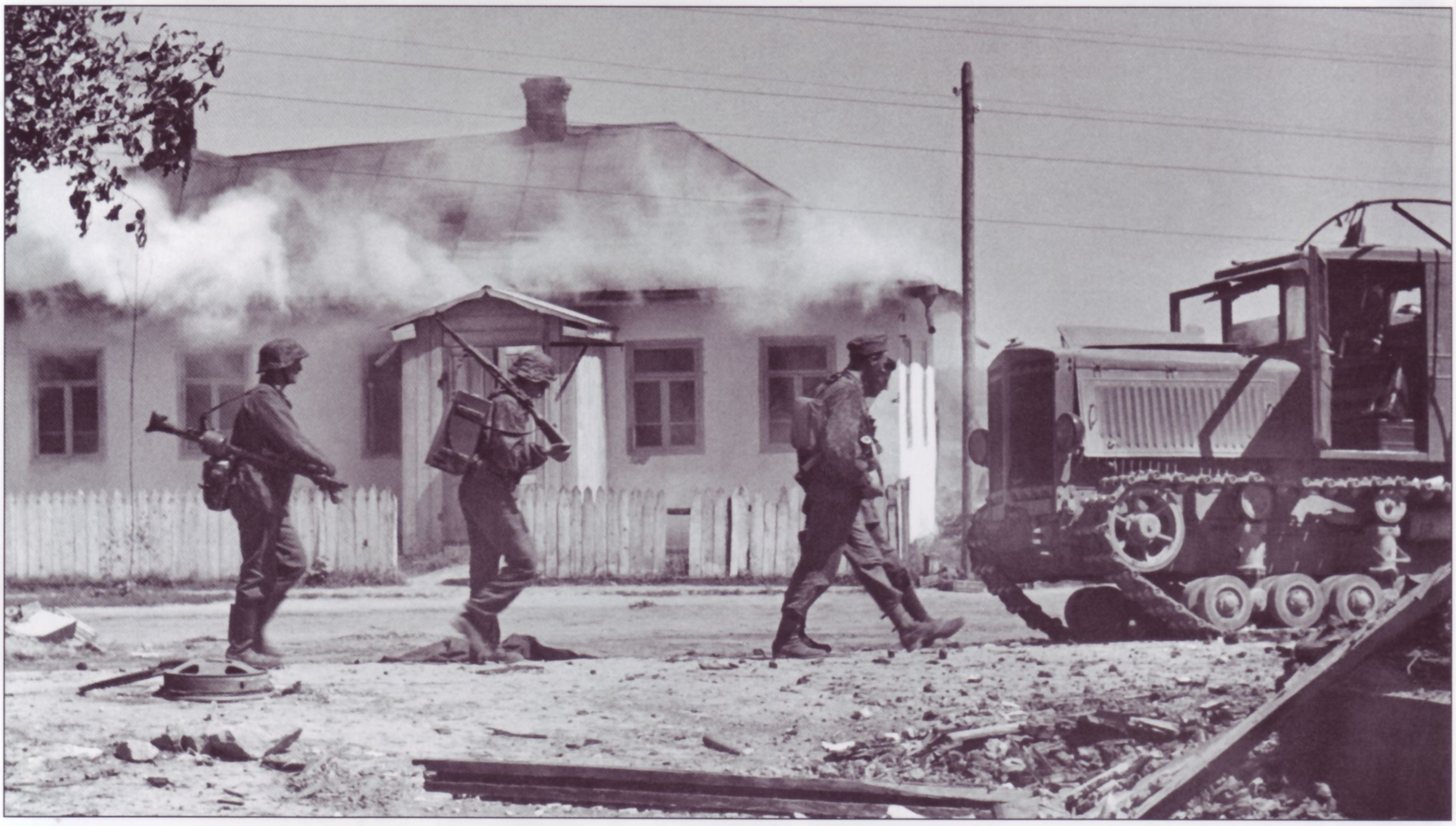
"Sepp" Dietrich negotiates the surrender of Greek troops after the collapse of British/Commonwealth forces in this country, April 1941. While this was the last operation in which Dietrich played a major overall command role, it did much to establish the Waffen-SS as Germany's "second army".

Obergruppenführer Reinhard "The Hangman" Heydrich (second from left), Chief of the Reich Main Security Office and Secuirty Service (Sicherheitsdienst) together with General der Infanterie Rudolf Toussaint (to Heydrich's right) and Gruppenführer Frank (second from the right) of the SS-Economic and Administrative Main Office (SS-Wirtschafts-und Verwaltungshauptamt) accompanied by Dr. Emil Hacha (first from right), President of Czechoslovakia under German control inspects a hospital train provided by Czechoslovak Government for German troops fighting in Russia. Frank wears the Reichführung-SS Armband.

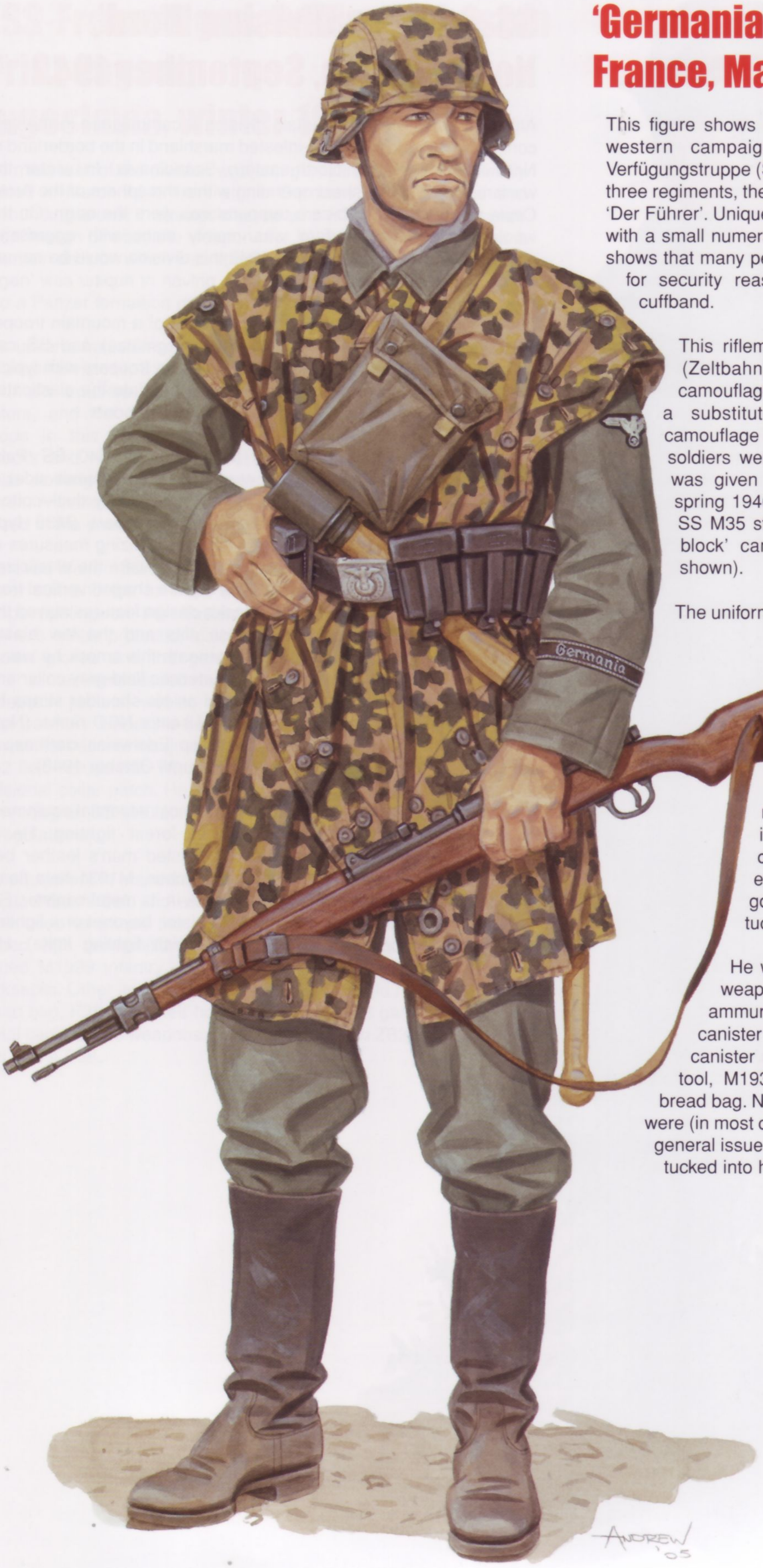
The fight against the communist Soviet Union was somewhat popular in Europe; in many western countries the SS found a fertile recruiting ground for young men wishing to contribute to this fight. Here Himmler speaks to potential Norwegian volunteers in Oslo. General von Falkenhorst (first from right), Reichskommisar Terbow (left of him), and Vidkun Quisling (sitting in black suit) are seen attending this meeting. "Legion Norge" was formed in Norway and would eventually be expanded to 11.SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Nordland" to fight on the Ostfront.



Early in Operation Barbarossa, comrades check the back of a wounded Kradschützen of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung "Totenkopf", from SS-Division "Totenkopf." This incident occurred in Lithuania in July 1941. The wounded soldier wears a civilian scarf, a common practice. Note the leichten Panzerspähwagen (Fu) Sd.Kfz. 223 in the background, with its "Rahmenantenne" (frame antenna) folded down for movement.



SS troops march through a village on the Polish/Ukrainian border in July of 1941. The radioman is followed by a machine-gunner armed with an MG34, which was the standard German light machine-gun, which had begun to be more widely issued to the Waffen-SS. They march past an abandoned Soviet Voroshilovyets heavy artillery tractor.



SS-Schütze, 'Germania' SS-Verfügungs Division, France, May 1940

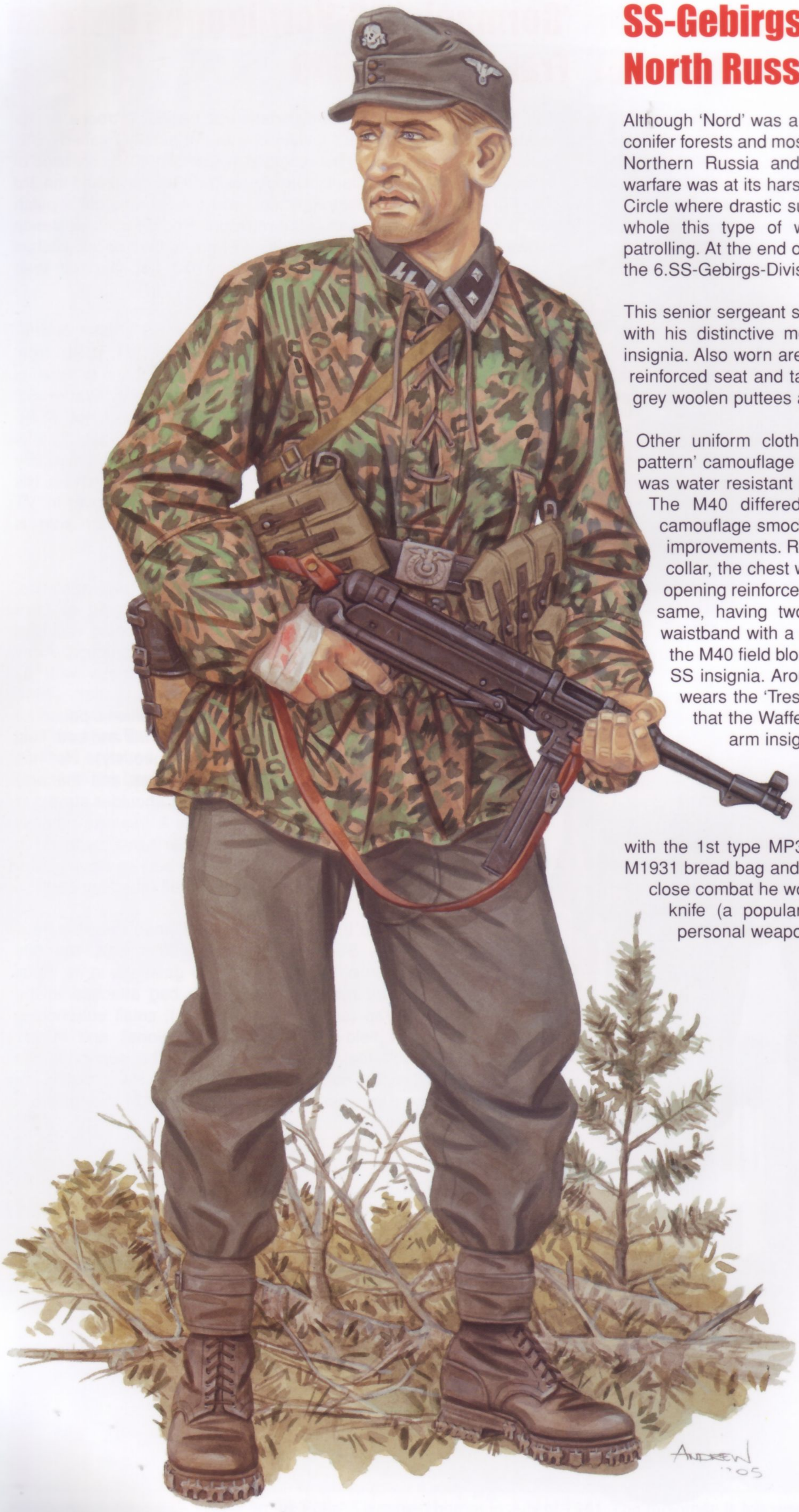
This figure shows one uniform variation of the SS-V troops in the western campaign. The division was originally called SS-Verfügungstruppe (SS-VT) but renamed in spring 1940. It consisted of three regiments, the 1st 'Deutschland', the 2nd 'Germania' and the 3rd 'Der Führer'. Unique to these regiments was the SS rune collar patch with a small numeral indicating the regiment. Photographic evidence shows that many personnel in the SS-V removed their collar patches for security reasons but curiously they did not take off their cuffband.

This rifleman wears the multi-purpose SS shelter quarter (Zeltbahn) showing its spring/summer 'VT plain tree' camouflage outermost. In this case the Zeltbahn is used as a substitute camouflage smock. In 1940 Waffen-SS camouflage smocks were more wide spread, but not all SS soldiers were issued smocks still due to shortages. Priority was given to producing helmet covers & Zeltbahnen. By spring 1940 smock production was starting to catch up. His SS M35 steel helmet has the 1st type helmet cover in 'VT block' camouflage pattern (the spring/summer side is shown).

The uniform consists of the SS M36 field-grey service blouse, which had fallen out of favor and was now being replaced by the more practical Army M36 field blouse with its dark-green collar (1940 was a transitional period for the Waffen-SS and both field blouses were worn simultaneously). He has removed his black collar patches and the only insignia (apart from the black shoulder straps) is on his left arm, the SS eagle & swastika national emblem and the first type 'Germania' cuffband in gothic script. His SS field-grey service trousers are tucked into his pre-war long shaft marching boots.

He wears the standard issue rifleman's equipment & weapons, SS enlisted man's leather belt, two rifle ammunition pouches, the M1938 gasmask in its metal canister and rubberized gas cape bag attached to the canister strap (as regulations dictate), small entrenching tool, M1931 field flask and S84/98 bayonet, and M1931 bread bag. Note that the M1939 infantry leather support straps were (in most cases) not worn in this campaign. He is holding the general issue Karabiner 98k rifle and has an M24 stick grenade tucked into his belt.

SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Gebirgs-Division 'Nord', North Russia, September 1942



Although 'Nord' was a mountain division it campaigned in the vast conifer forests and mosquito-infested marshland in the borderland of Northern Russia and North-eastern Scandinavia. In winter the warfare was at its harshest operating within the sphere of the Arctic Circle where drastic sub-zero temperatures were the norm. On the whole this type of warfare was mainly static with aggressive patrolling. At the end of October 1942 this division would be named the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division 'Nord'.

This senior sergeant shows all the hallmarks of a mountain trooper with his distinctive mountain field cap (Bergmütze) and SS cap insignia. Also worn are the field-grey mountain trousers with typical reinforced seat and tapering legs to accommodate the elasticated grey woolen puttees and cleated sole mountain boots.

Other uniform clothing worn is the reversible M40 SS 'Palm pattern' camouflage smock (showing the spring/summer side). It was water resistant being made from a high quality duck-cotton. The M40 differed from its earlier counterpart (M38 type camouflage smock) by having a few economizing measures or improvements. Removed from production were the elasticized collar, the chest wind flap and the square shaped vertical front opening reinforcement. The smock's design features stayed the same, having two vertical access slits and the low elastic waistband with a short skirt. Underneath this smock he wears the M40 field blouse with its characteristic field-grey collar and SS insignia. Around the collar and on his shoulder straps he wears the 'Tresse' braid, typical of senior NCO ranks. (Note that the Waffen-SS mountain troop 'Edelweiss' cloth cap & arm insignia was not issued until October 1943)

He only wears the most essential equipment for close quarter forest fighting. He is wearing the SS enlisted man's leather belt with the 1st type MP38/40 magazine pouches, M1931 field flask, M1931 bread bag and an M1938 gasmask in its metal canister. For close combat he would either have a pistol, bayonet or a fighting knife (a popular type was the Finnish fighting knife). His personal weapon is the MP40.

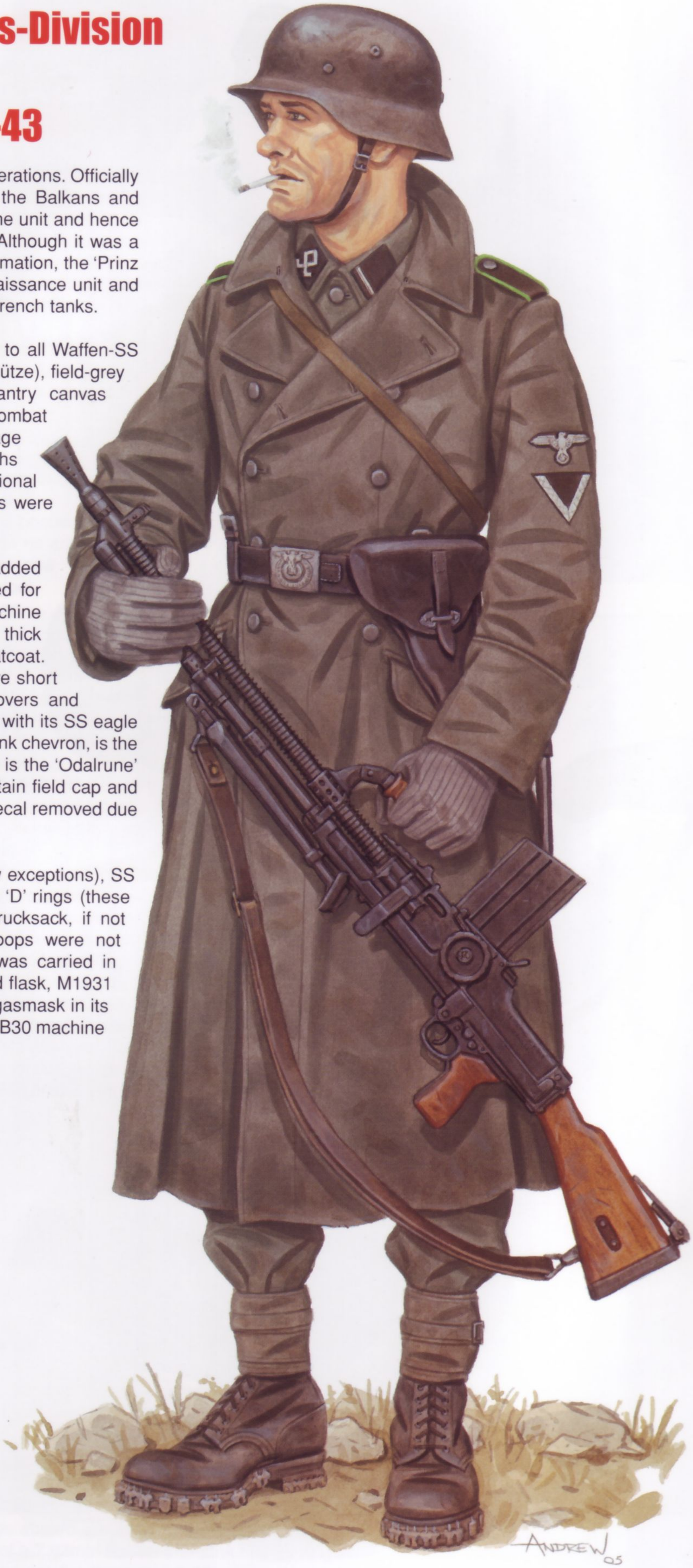
SS-Sturmmann, 7.SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division ‘Prinz Eugen’, Yugoslavia, winter 1942-43

The main task of the division was anti-partisan operations. Officially formed in March 1942 from ethnic Germans in the Balkans and surrounding areas. It was not classed as a front line unit and hence given foreign or obsolete weapons for its duties. Although it was a mountain division which was strictly an infantry formation, the ‘Prinz Eugen’ was unique in having an armored reconnaissance unit and also a Panzer formation made up from captured French tanks.

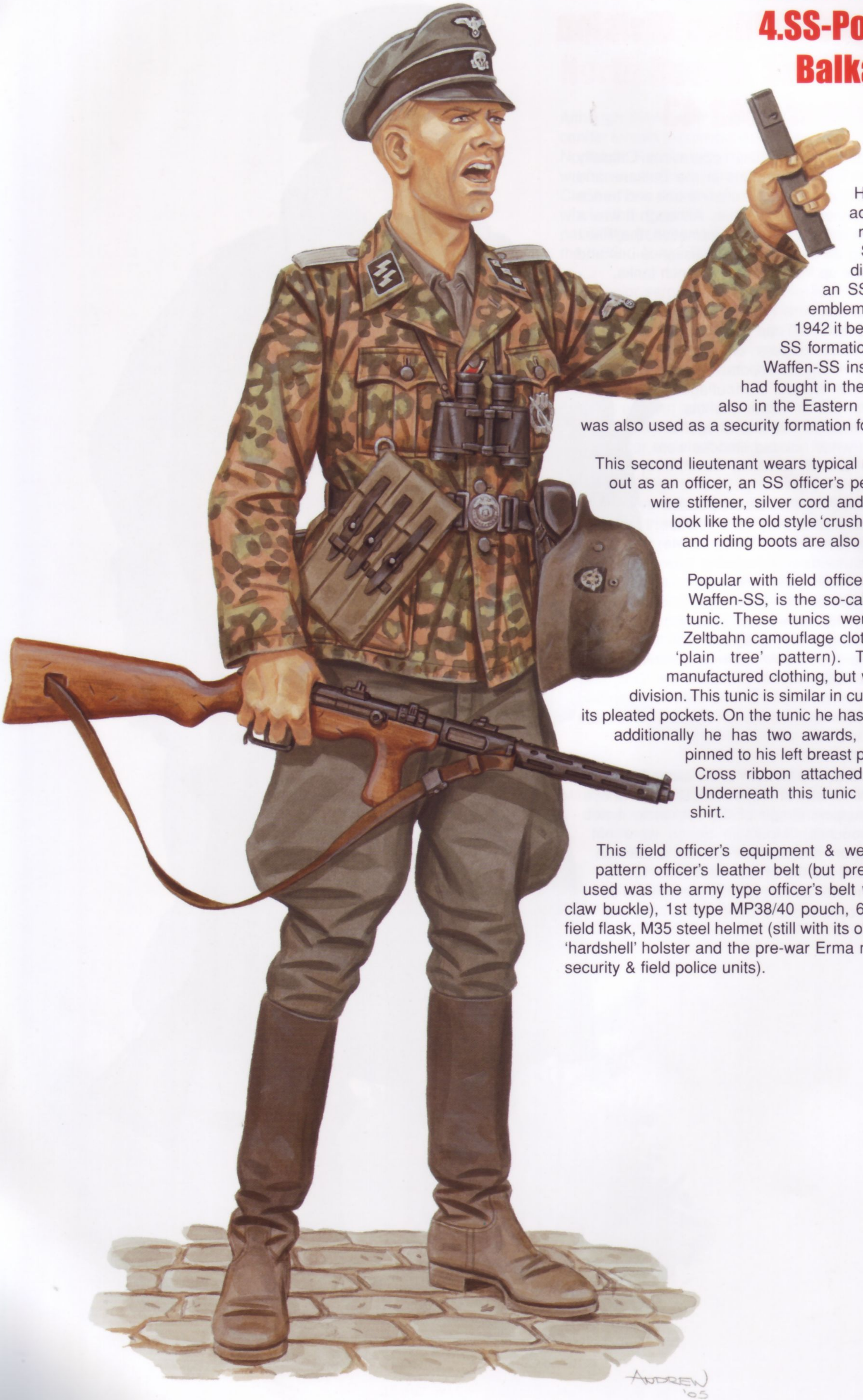
The uniform issued was the standard type given to all Waffen-SS mountain divisions, SS mountain field cap (Bergmütze), field-grey mountain trousers, short ankle puttees or infantry canvas gaiters, and the obligatory mountain boots. Combat troops in this division were issued camouflage smocks and helmet covers, but in winter months these clothing items were handed into the divisional stores. A limited amount of white hooded smocks were issued in the snow period of winter.

Improved Waffen-SS winter clothing such as the padded winter suit and the fur-lined anorak was reserved for troops fighting on the Eastern Front. This machine gunner's winter protection came down to wearing thick woolen gloves and the general issue SS greatcoat. Other winter items issued (but not seen here) were short sheepskin jackets, woolen torques, woolen pullovers and wrist warmers. Under his field-grey M40 greatcoat with its SS eagle & swastika national insignia and SS-Sturmmann rank chevron, is the M42 field blouse with Waffen-SS insignia. Of note is the ‘Odalrune’ divisional collar patch. He has removed his mountain field cap and is wearing an SS M40 steel helmet (with the left decal removed due to regulations).

His equipment is standard issue (apart from a few exceptions), SS enlisted man's belt and additional belt loops with ‘D’ rings (these were used to attach the support straps of the rucksack, if not issued with ammunition pouches). Mountain troops were not issued M1939 infantry support straps; their kit was carried in rucksacks. Other items carried are the M1931 field flask, M1931 bread bag, P38 ‘hardshell’ holster and an M1938 gasmask in its metal canister. His weapons consist of the Czech ZB30 machine gun and a P38.



SS-Untersturmführer, 4.SS-Polizei-Division, Balkans, May 1943



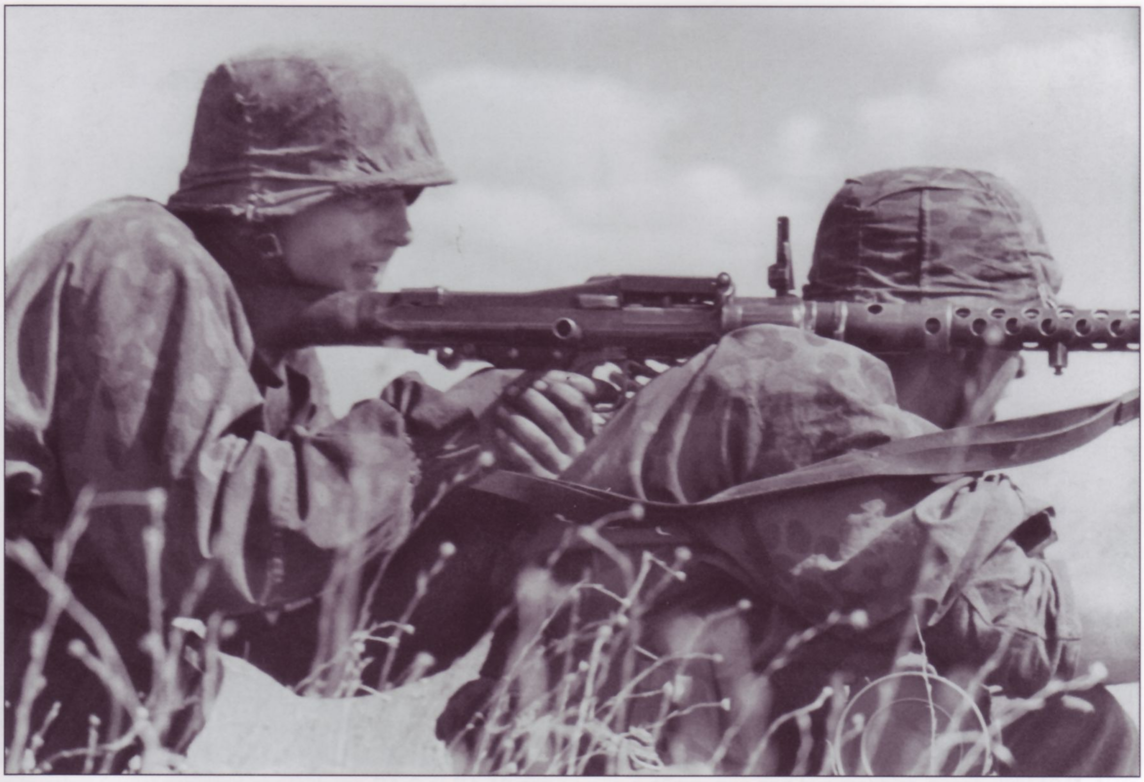
Raised in October 1939 from uniformed 'civilian' police, this division came under the umbrella of Himmler's SS & police administration; it was not regarded as a true Waffen-SS division. It had its own distinctive police insignia with an SS eagle & swastika national emblem on the arm. In February 1942 it became a fully-fledged Waffen-SS formation and was issued with new Waffen-SS insignia. Although this division had fought in the Western Front in 1940 and also in the Eastern Front 1941 to early 1943, it was also used as a security formation for anti-partisan operations.

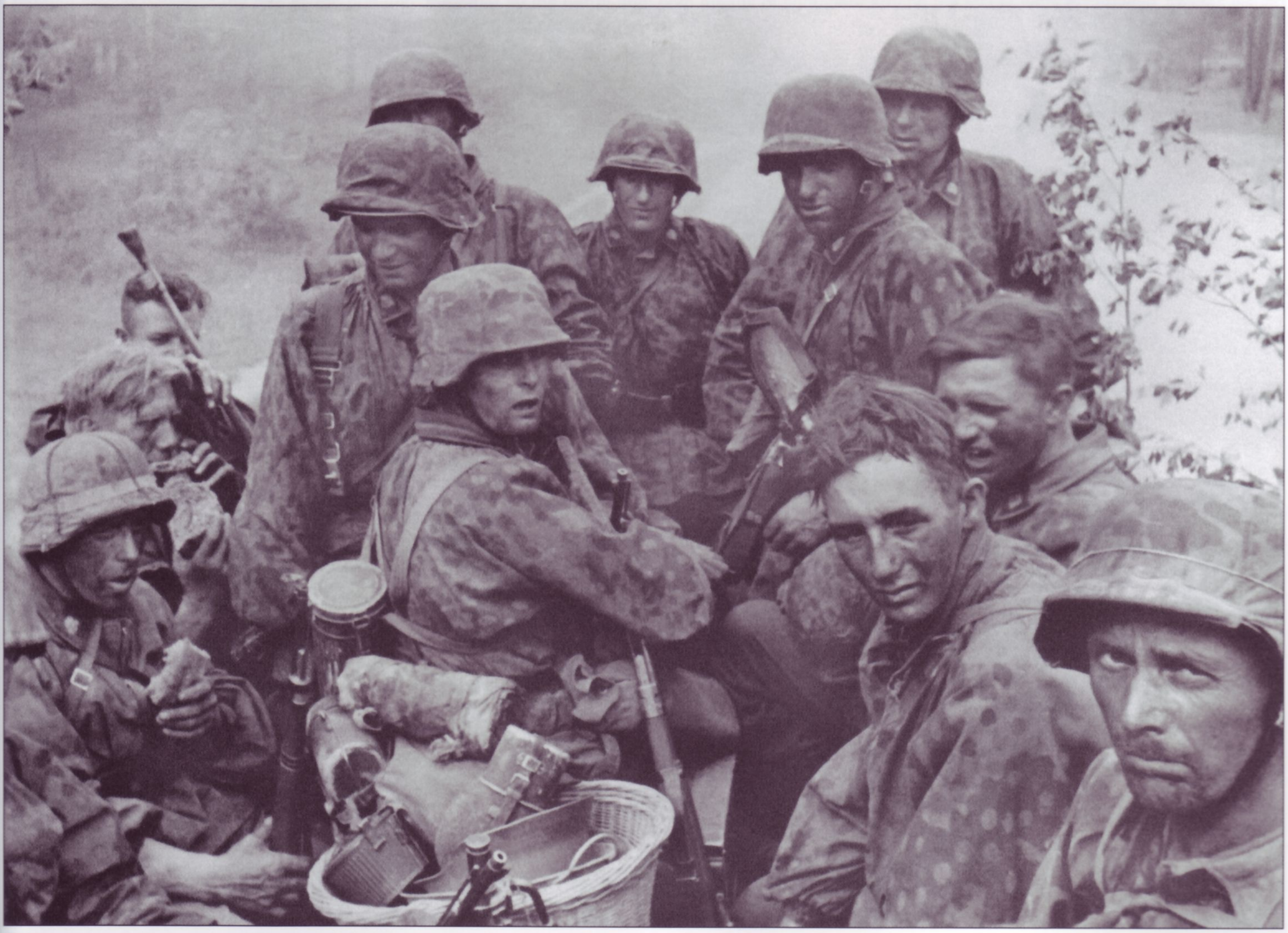
This second lieutenant wears typical uniform items that mark him out as an officer, an SS officer's peaked cap with the removed wire stiffener, silver cord and fixings, in order to make it look like the old style 'crusher' cap. SS officer's breeches and riding boots are also worn.

Popular with field officers and senior NCOs in the Waffen-SS, is the so-called 'field made' camouflage tunic. These tunics were made from high quality Zeltbahn camouflage cloth (this example in later type 'plain tree' pattern). They were not generally manufactured clothing, but were made by tailors in their division. This tunic is similar in cut to the M36 field blouse with its pleated pockets. On the tunic he has the full SS officer's insignia, additionally he has two awards, the infantry assault badge pinned to his left breast pocket and the 2nd class Iron Cross ribbon attached to his second buttonhole. Underneath this tunic is the standard issue grey shirt.

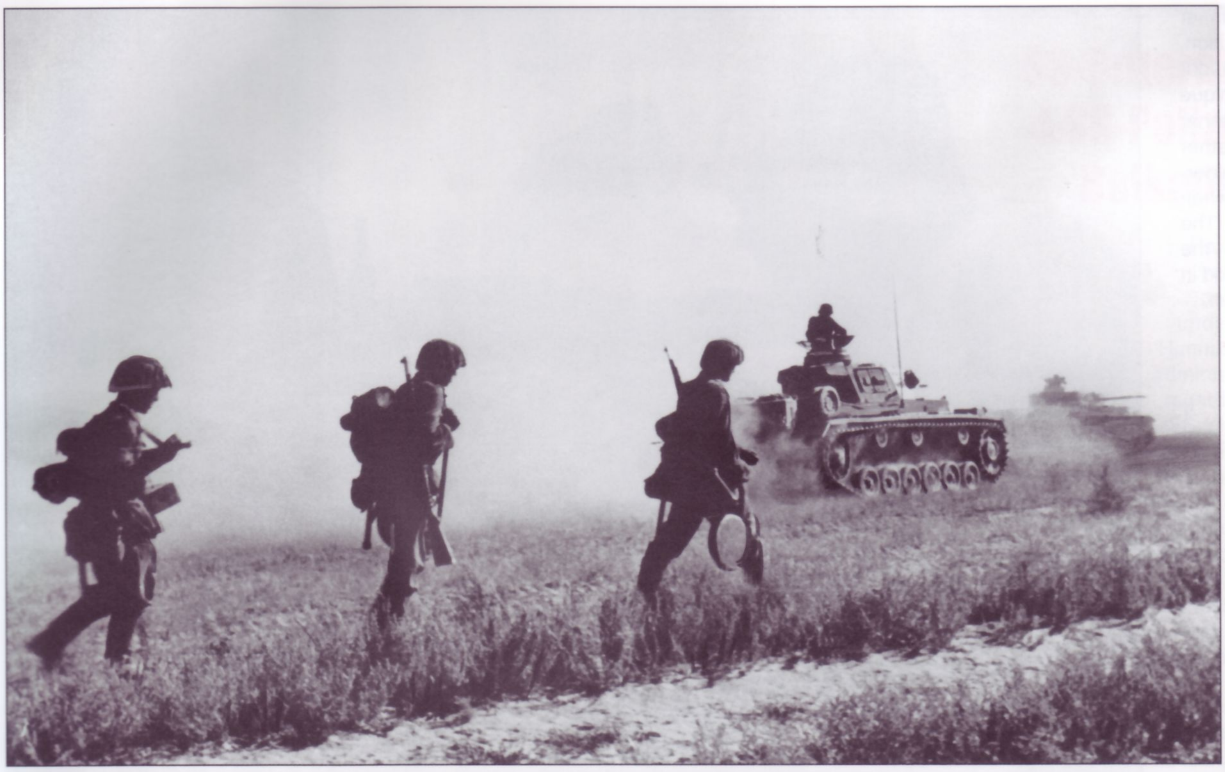
This field officer's equipment & weapons consists of; the SS pattern officer's leather belt (but preferred and most commonly used was the army type officer's belt with its more secure double claw buckle), 1st type MP38/40 pouch, 6x30 field binoculars, M1931 field flask, M35 steel helmet (still with its old police decal insignia), P38 'hardshell' holster and the pre-war Erma machine-pistol (issued to SS security & field police units).

An MG34 machine-gun gunner opens fire on a Soviet position, using his assistant's shoulder as a support. This technique was used to provide the gunner with a stable support rather than attempting to "shoulder-fire" the gun on his own, when firing over high vegetation. The assistant would grasp the dropped, but still folded bipod in order to help steady the gun.

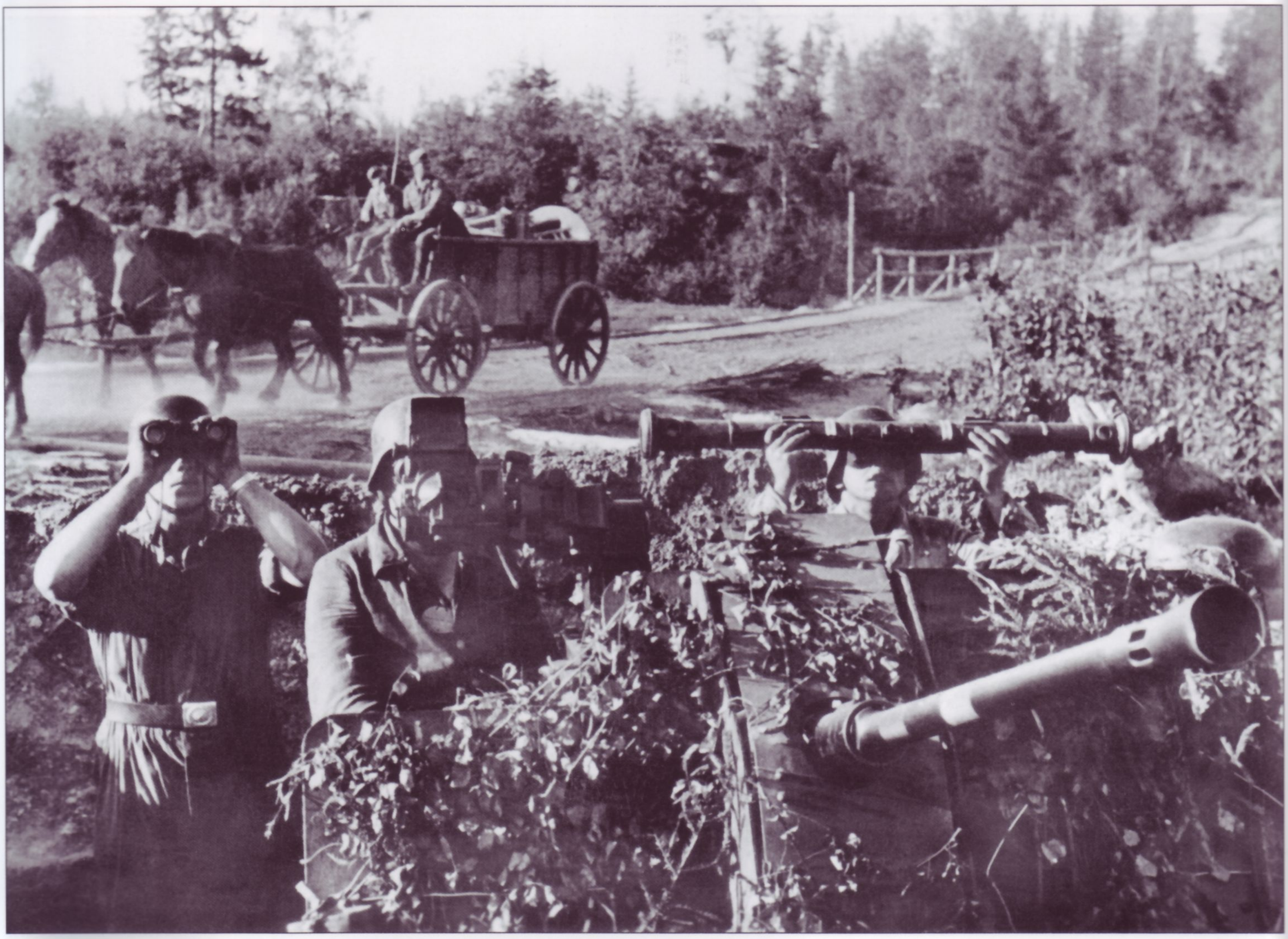




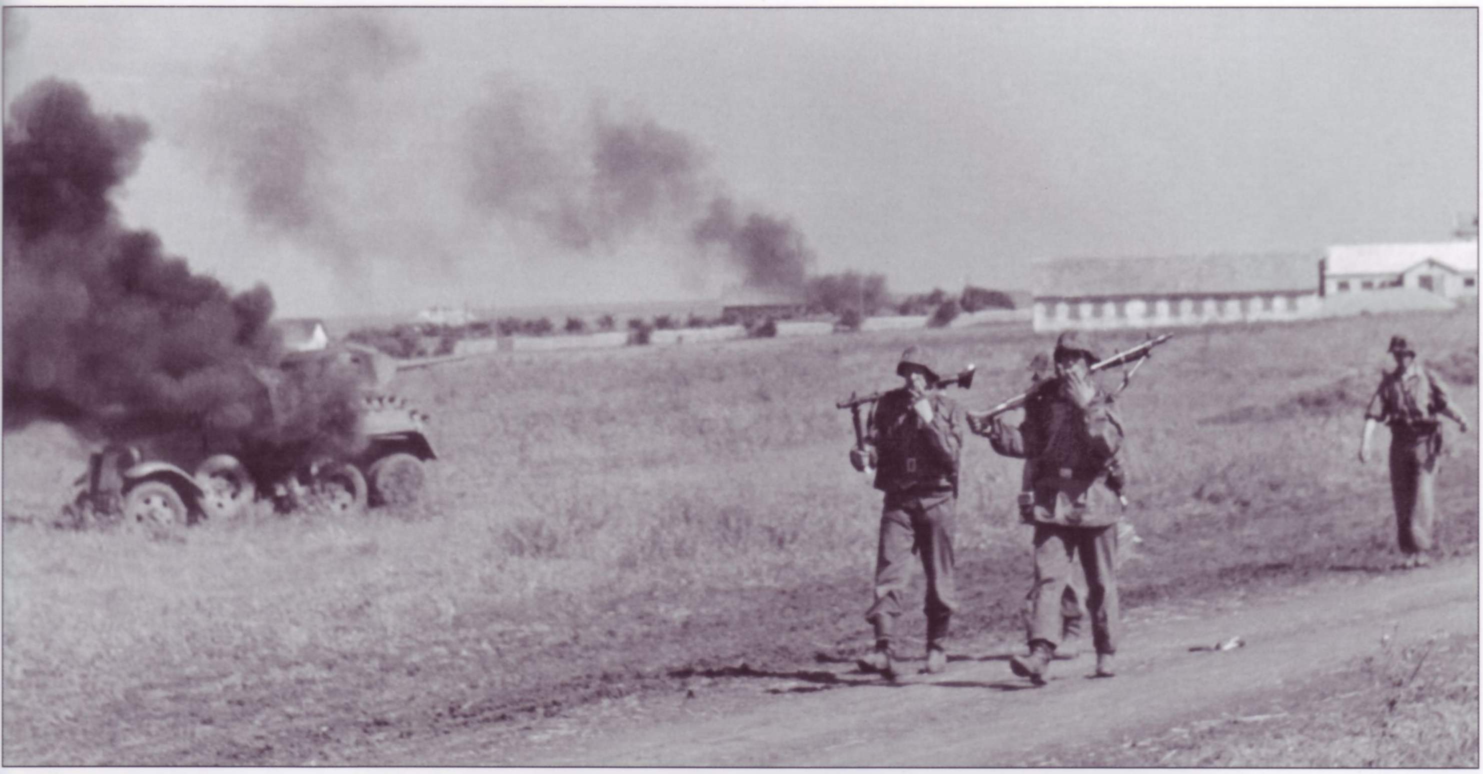
Exhausted and dust-covered "Totenkopf" Division troops aboard a truck during the drive into Russia. The division's death's head emblem can be seen on some of their collars. To the left can be seen the barrel of a 7.92mm PzB39 anti-tank rifle (distinguished from the earlier PzB38 by the fore-sight and muzzle brake), which saw limited use with the Waffen-SS. It did not fire the same 7.92mm round used in rifles and machine-guns, but a "necked down" 13mm cartridge with a 94mm long case.



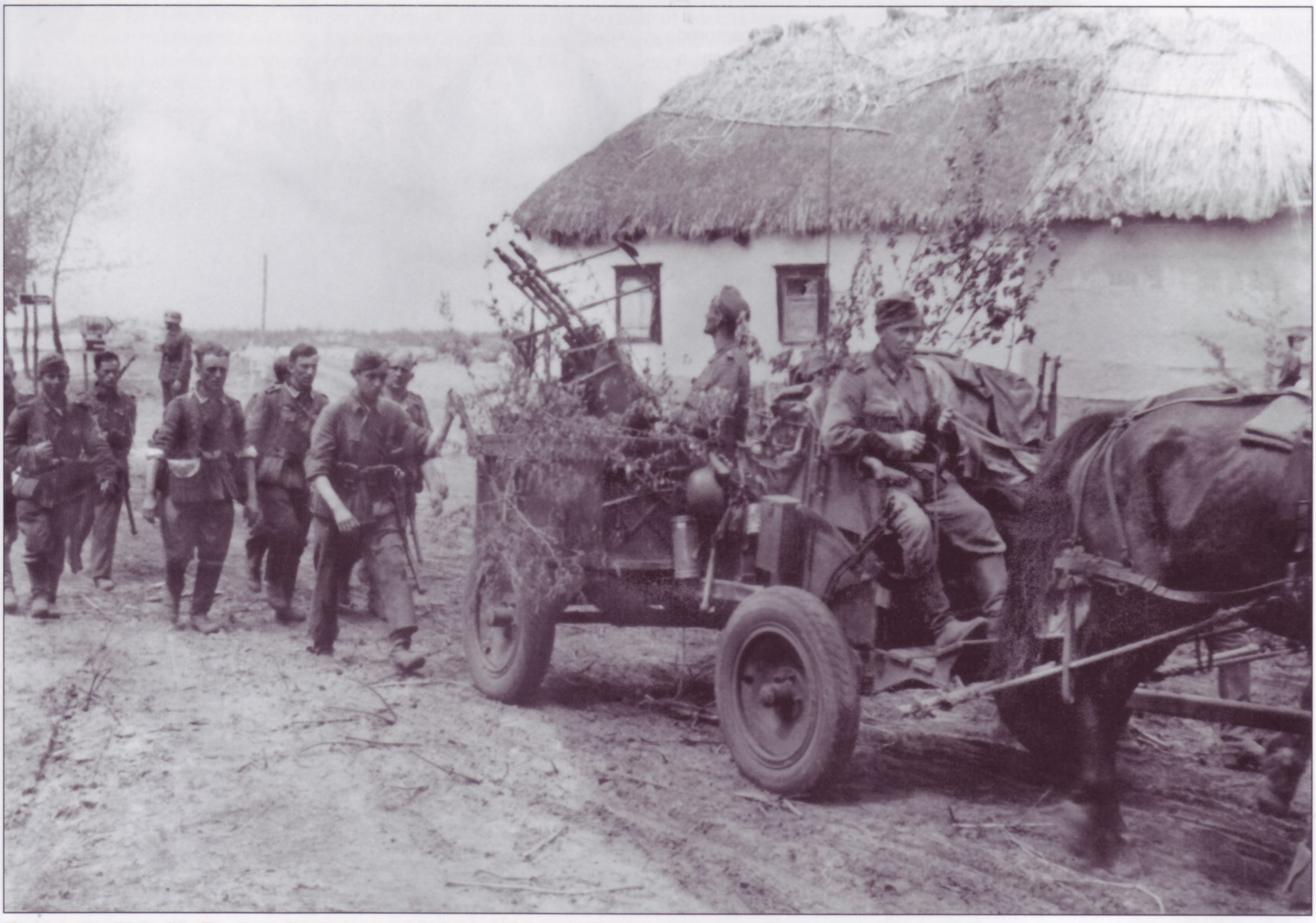
Heavily loaded infantrymen prod on through the dust as Pz.Kpfw.III tanks pass. The lead rifleman carries a 21-pound T.Mi.35 Tellermine, what the Allies called a "T-mine." A carrying handle was fitted on one side. These mines were usually painted light gray, sometimes field gray (a dark green), with black or white markings. Tellermine means platter mine, not mushroom mine as is sometimes reported.



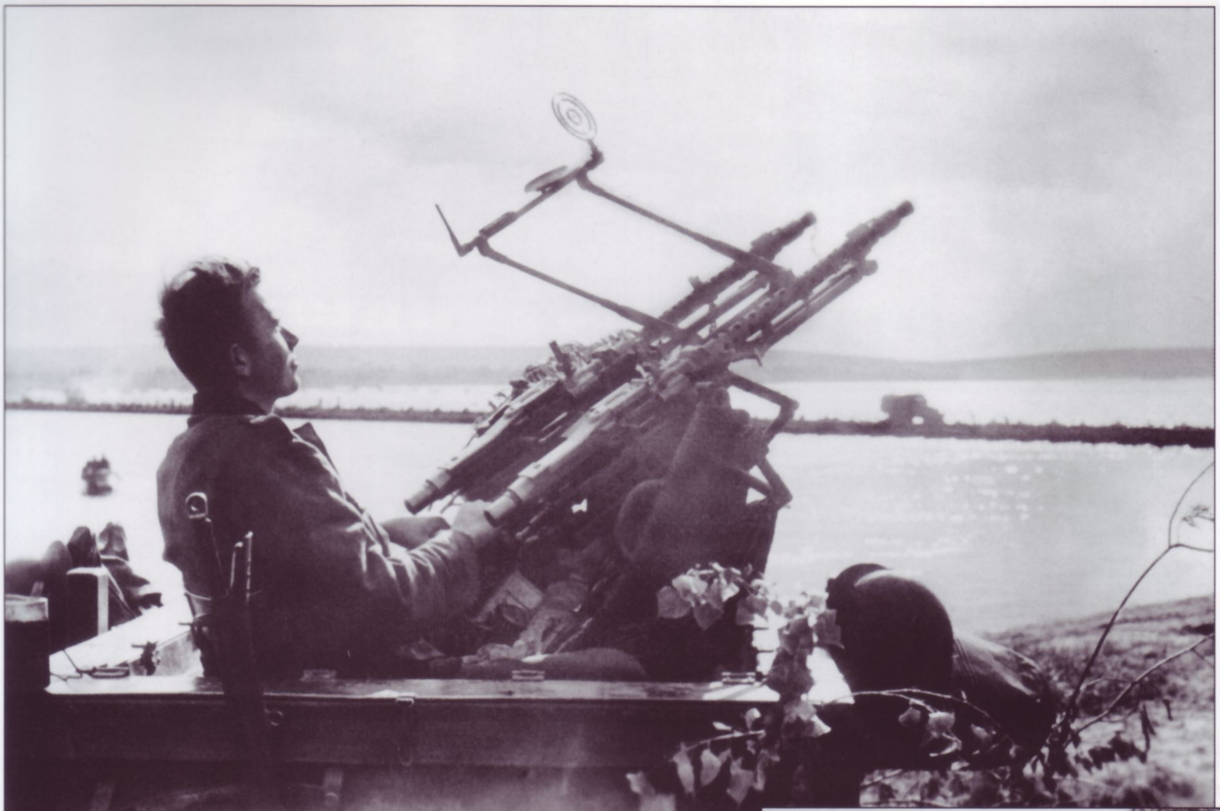
This well-camouflaged 2cm FlaK38 antiaircraft gun protects a supply route. One of the crew uses a 1-meter Em.R.1m. stereographic rangefinder. This weapon had a practical rate of fire of 180 to 220 rounds per minute. In the background is an Hf. 2 heavy field wagon. While similar in design to the Hf. 1 light field wagon used by rifle platoons and companies, the Hf. 2 carried 2 tons of cargo and was mainly used by artillery units and transport columns. It was drawn by two, four, or six horses depending on the load and terrain. In Southern Russian the Germans even used captured Russian camels to draw supply wagons.



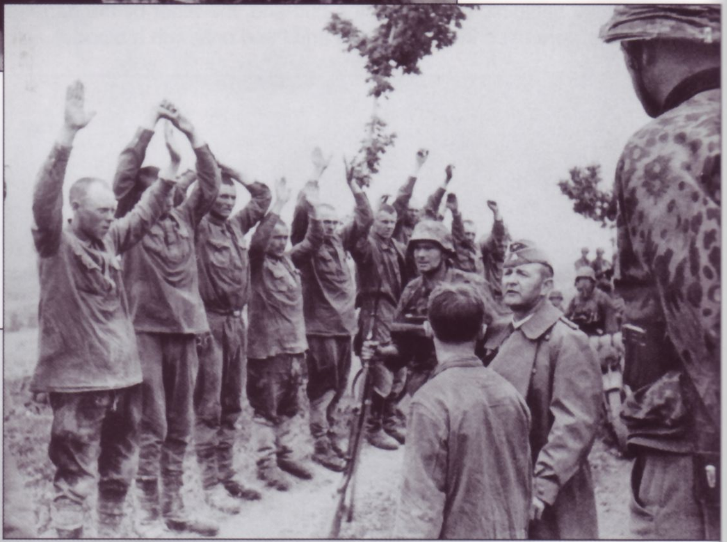
Two MG34 machine-gunners pass a burning Soviet armored car (either a BA-6 or BA-10 armed with a 45mm gun and two machine-guns), July 1941. Note that one soldier balances the gun by the butt-end, the other by the barrel-end; both means of shoulder-carrying the MG34 were acceptable. MG34s issued to rifle groups were used in the light role and fitted only with a bipod.



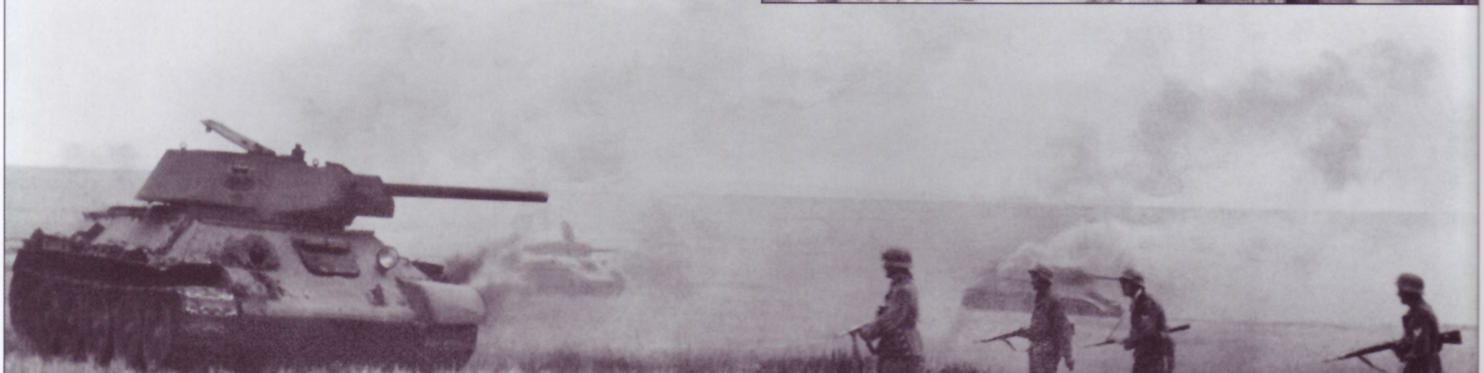
Troops pass through a Russian village accompanied by an If.5 machine gun wagon (Maschinengewehr-Wagen) with twin 7.92mm MG34 machine guns on a mount 36 (Lafette 36). Besides ammunition and machine gun accessories, the six-man crew's individual equipment was carried as well. Typically log cabins were encountered, what the Germans called an Isba, the barrowed Russian word for a log cabin. However, this one has plastered walls, but still a thatch roof.



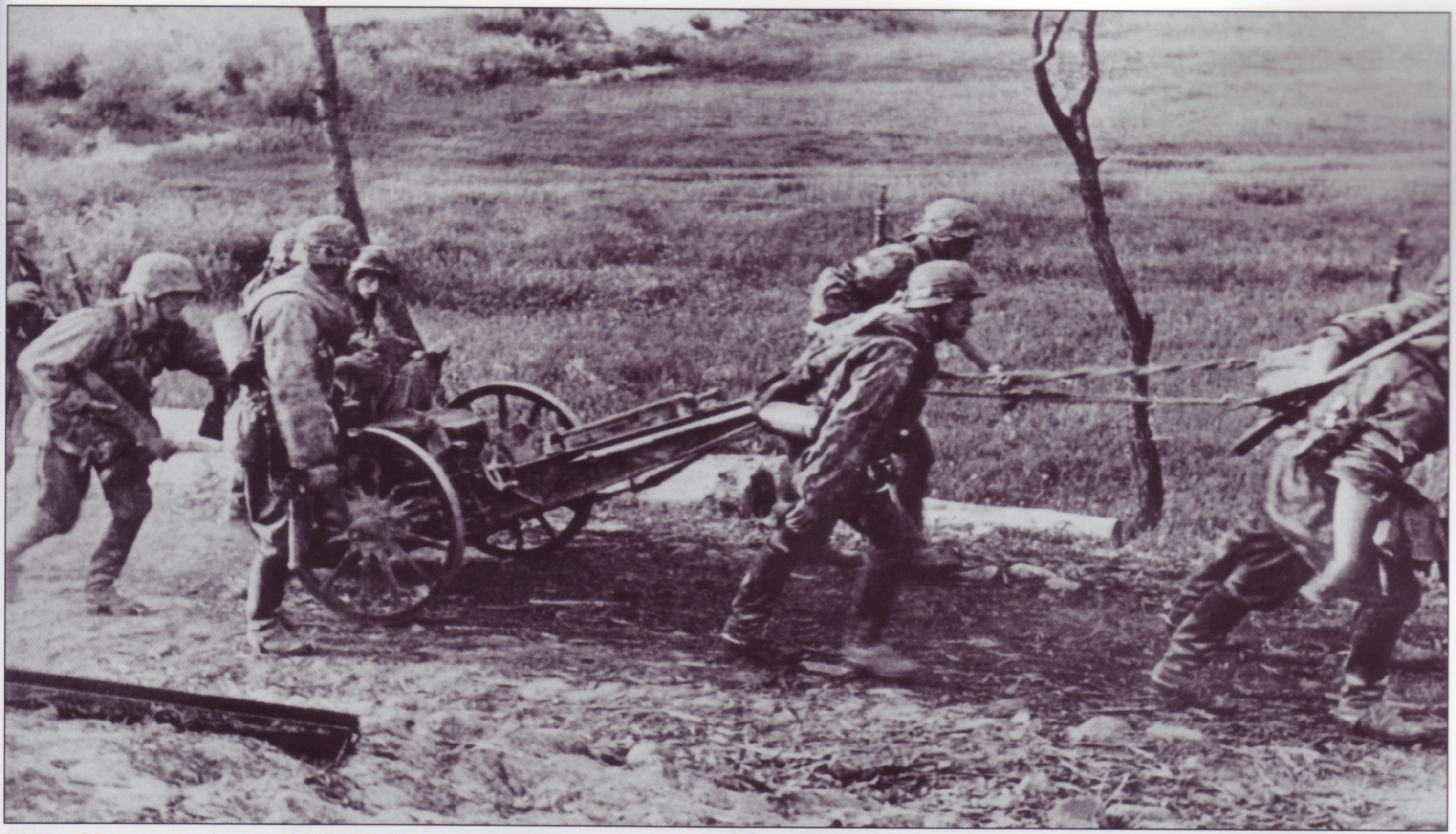
The If.5 machine gun wagon was issued to battalion machine gun companies, three per six-gun platoon. Insufficient numbers were available to outfit all units though. When mounted on the machine gun wagon the shoulder stocks and trigger mechanisms were removed from the guns and an integral triggering system used. These could be fitted back on when the guns were dismounted for ground use. The MG42 machine gun could also be mounted on this wagon. The two MG34s had a combined rate of fire of 1,600 to 1,800 rounds per minute.



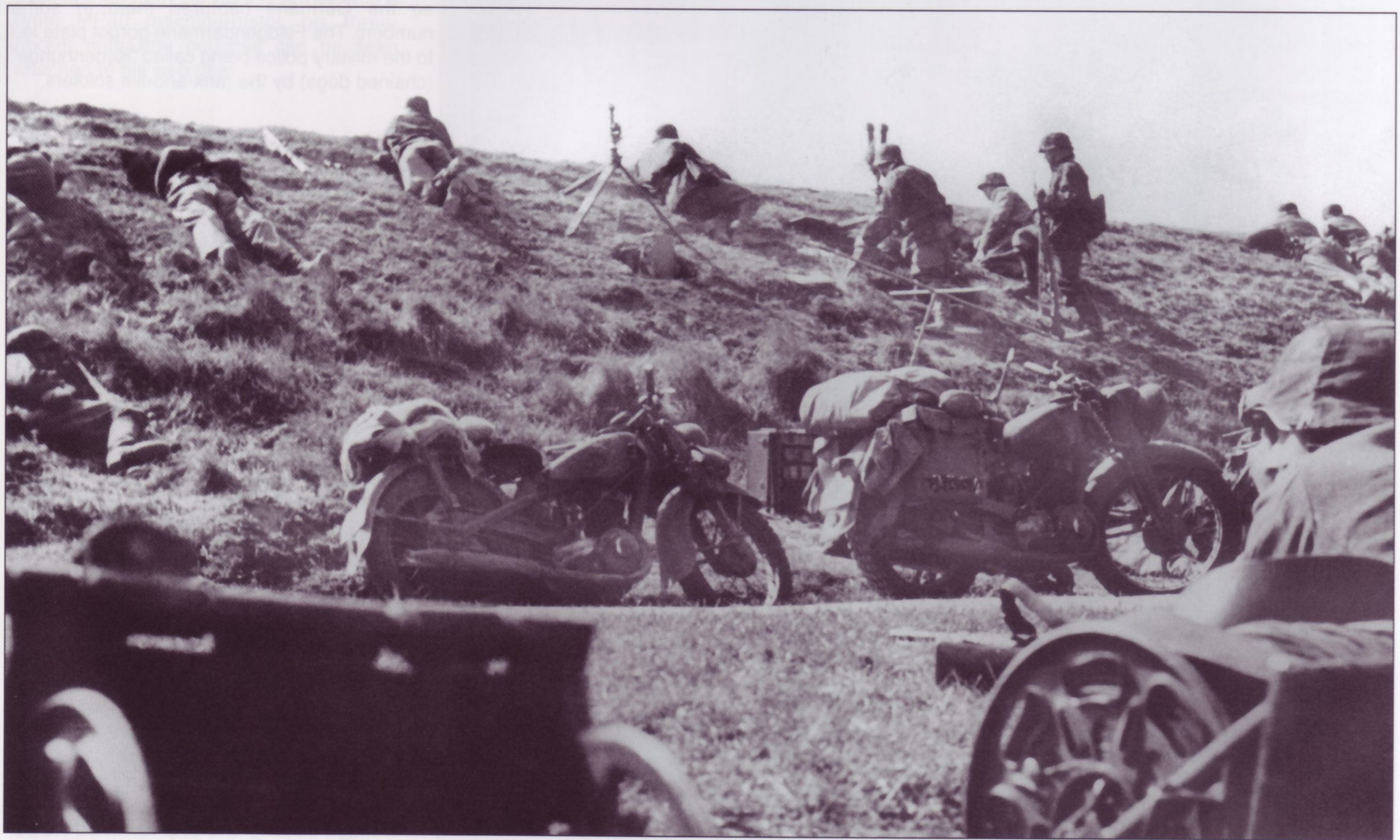
Waffen-SS troops of the "Totonkopf" Division provide instructions to captured Soviet soldiers through a prisoner able to speak German. There was a constant search for commissars and communist activists, who were routinely executed, according to Hitler's infamous "Commissar Order". The SS soldier in the center behind the interpreter is armed with the longer 7.92mm Gew98 rifle. The Kar98k carbine had replaced this in 1934, but large stockpiles of this World War I-vintage rifle were available, so they were issued to some Waffen-SS units.



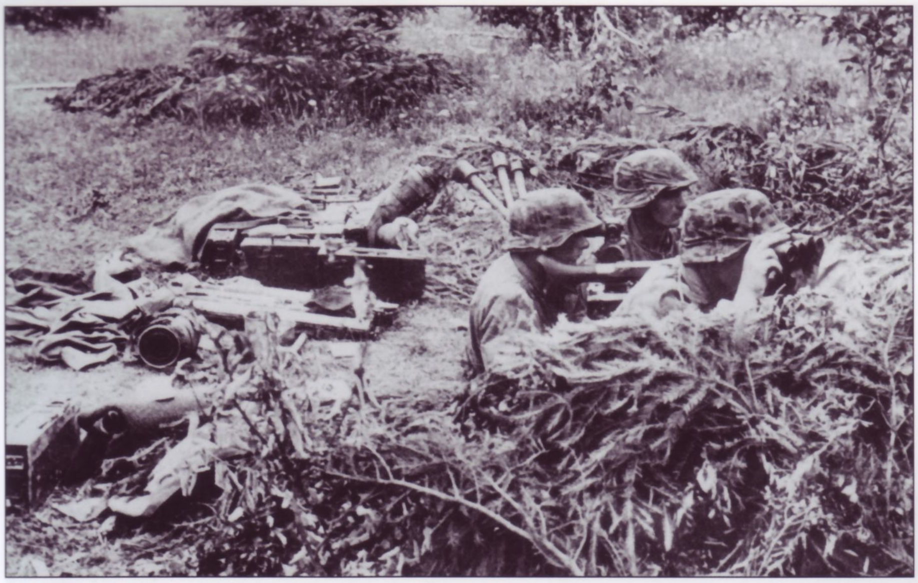
Infantrymen pass three still smoldering T-34/76 tanks, what the Russians called the "Tridsatchedverk" (34th), on a featureless steppe. The T-34 was a much feared and deadly weapon, but obviously it could be defeated. Besides the German's own 7.5cm gun-armed tanks, the 7.5cm PaK40 antitank gun and captured Russian 76.2mm F-22 field guns adapted by the Germans as antitank weapon and called the 7.62cm PaK36(r) took their toll.



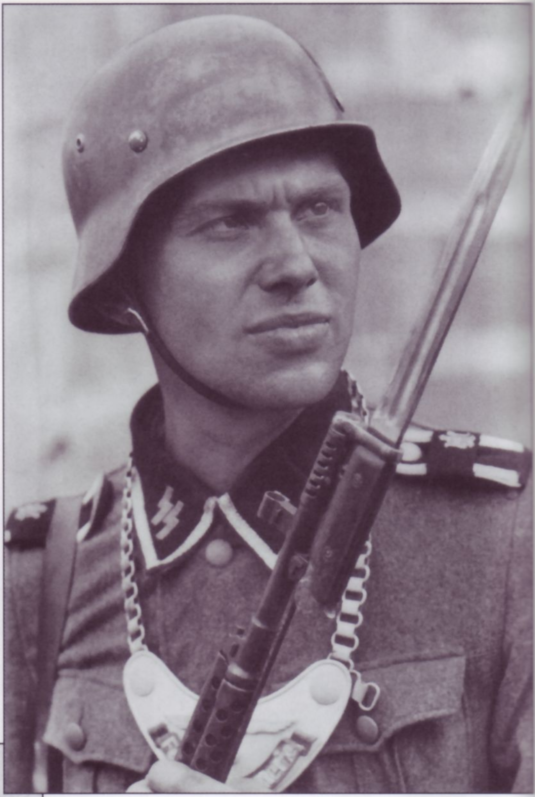
Waffen-SS troops haul a 7.5cm l.IG18 light infantry gun. This version has wooden-spoked wheels for transport by horse teams, while a rubber-tired version was available for vehicle towing. The infantry gun was introduced as the result of lessons learned in World War I, where the guns of the era proved too heavy to keep up with infantrymen crossing the extremely rough terrain of "no-man's land". This infantry gun was relatively light, simple to operate, and capable of direct fire against enemy machine-gun nests. It could also fire at a high trajectory against dug-in troops. An infantry regiment's 13.Kompanie usually had four 7.5cm l.IG18s and two 15cm s.IG33s, although the SS often lacked the latter.



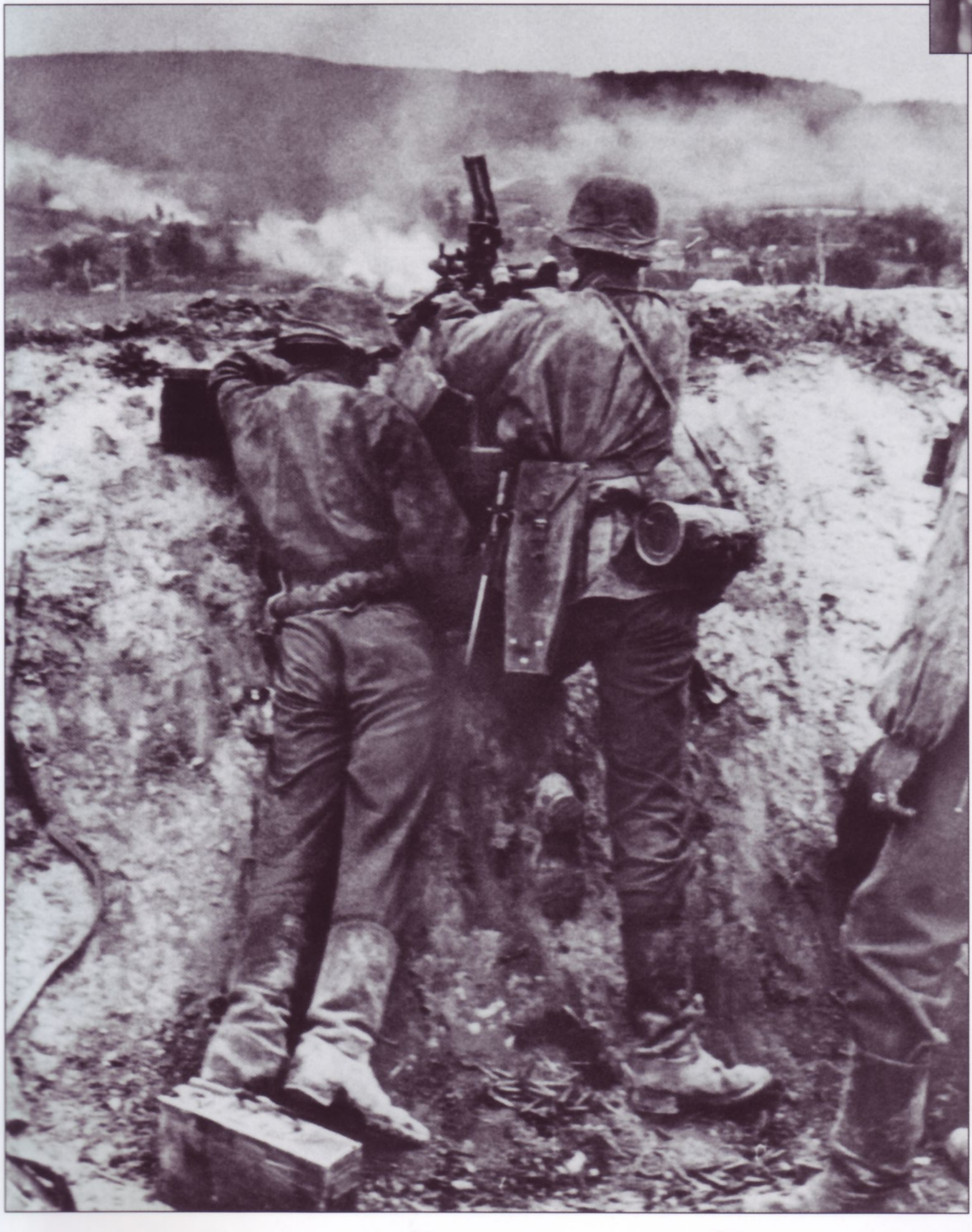
An artillery observation post is set-up within a rifle company's forward positions. A 6x30 Sf.14Z scissors periscope (Scherenfernrohr) is to the right.- To the left is an Rkr.31 aiming circle (Richtkreis) used for measuring vertical and horizontal angles and as an aid in making terrain sketches. Each artillery battery dispatched a forward observer party forward to acquire targets and adjust fire. In the foreground are field telephone cable reels. BMW motorcycles, used by couriers, sit in the mid-ground.



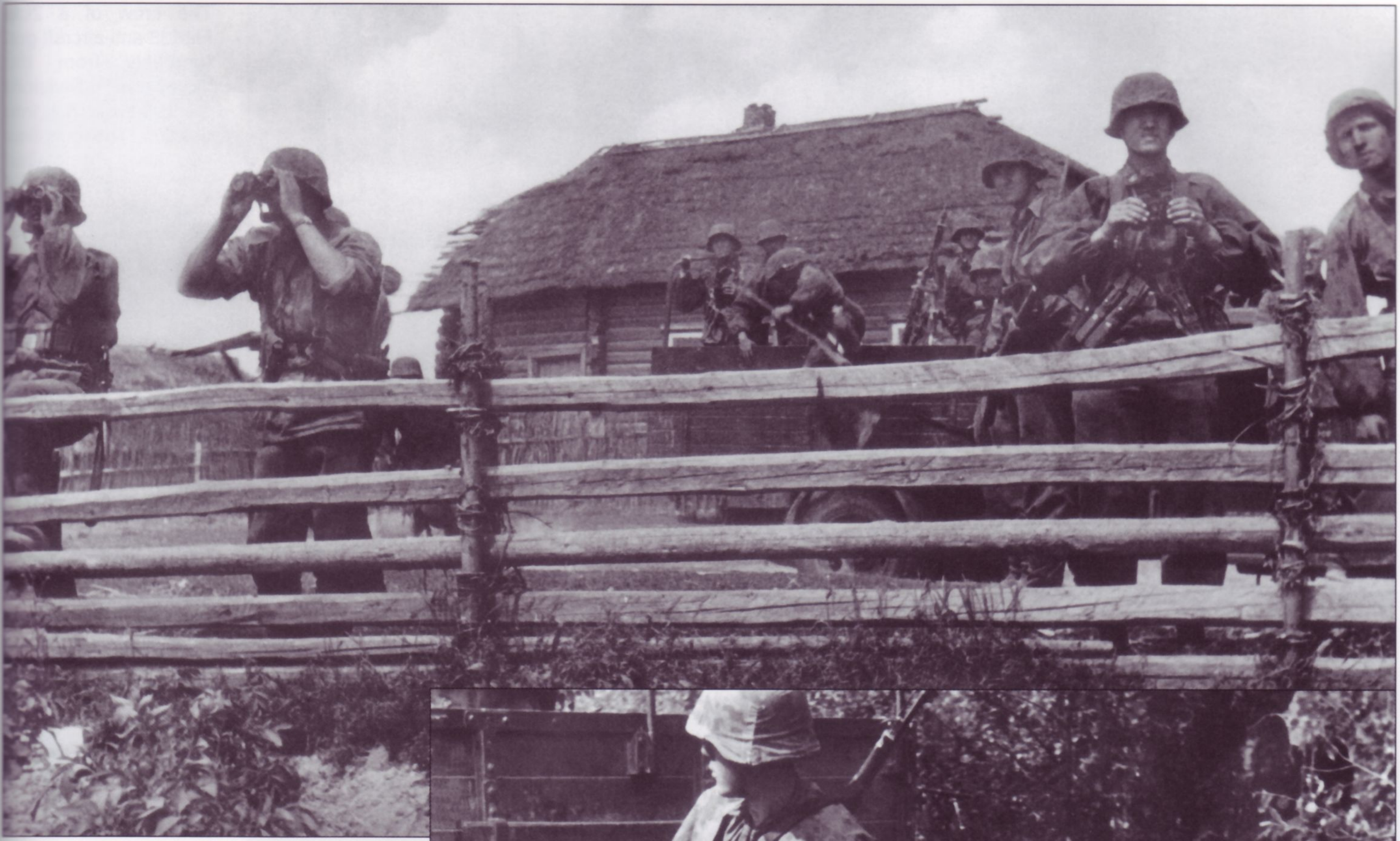
A Waffen-SS MG34 heavy machine-gun team dug in to a well-camouflaged firing position, August 1941. There are no less than 11 ammunition boxes and two or three spare barrels among the considerable load of equipment scattered about their position. The MG34 in the heavy role was provided with a tripod, long-range optical sight, stereo-optic rangefinder, additional spare barrels; eight were assigned to an infantry battalion's machine-gun company (4.Kompanie).



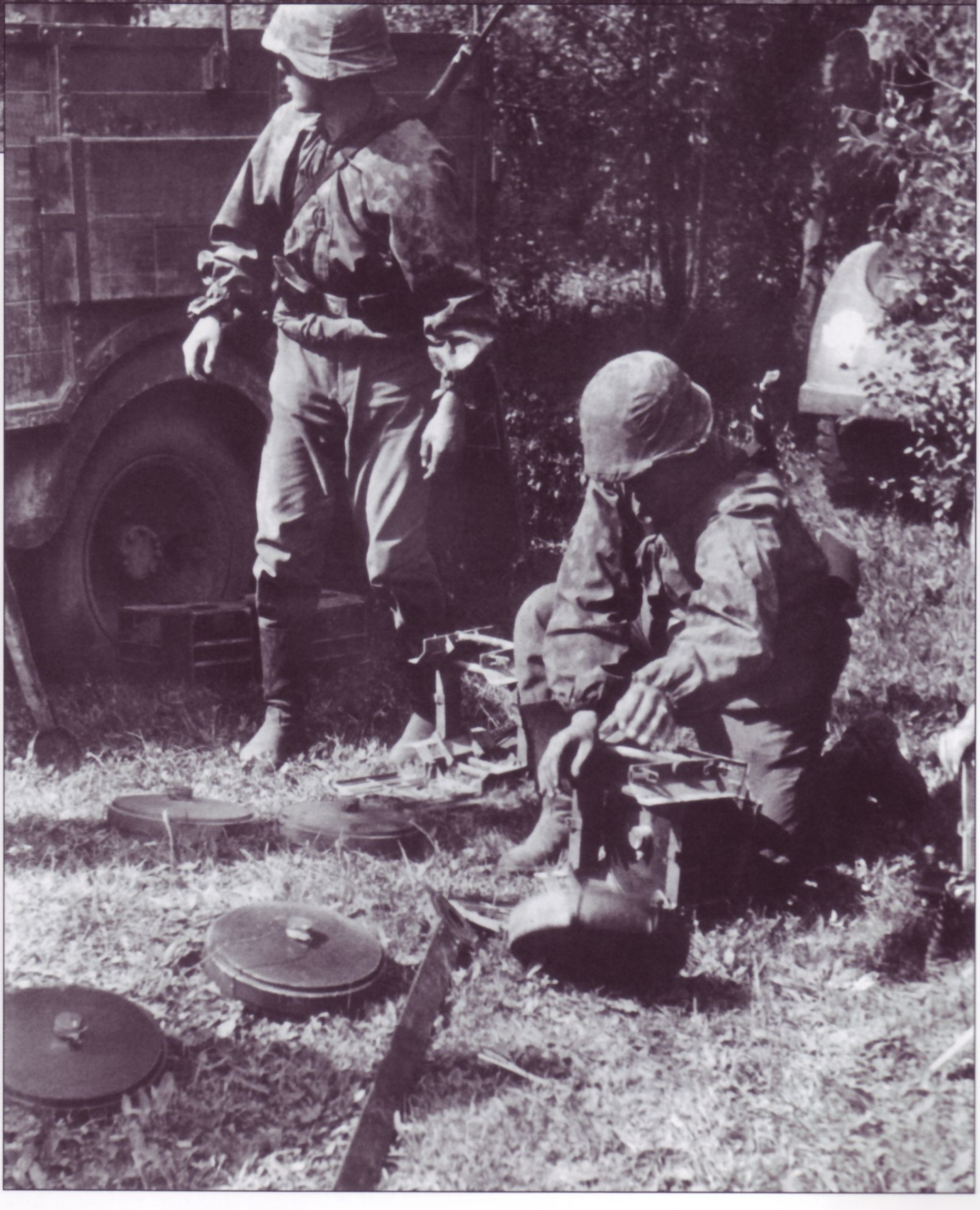
An "LAH" field military policeman (Feldgendarmerie) armed with Soviet 7.62mm Tokarev SVT-38 semi-automatic rifle. The Germans called it the 7.62mm Selbstladegewehr 258(r). In the early stages of Operation Barbarossa, the Soviets were in the process of re-arming their infantry with this rifle, so the Germans captured them in some numbers. The Feldgendarmerie gorgot plate led to the military police being called "Kettenhunde" (chained dogs) by the rank-and-file soldiers.



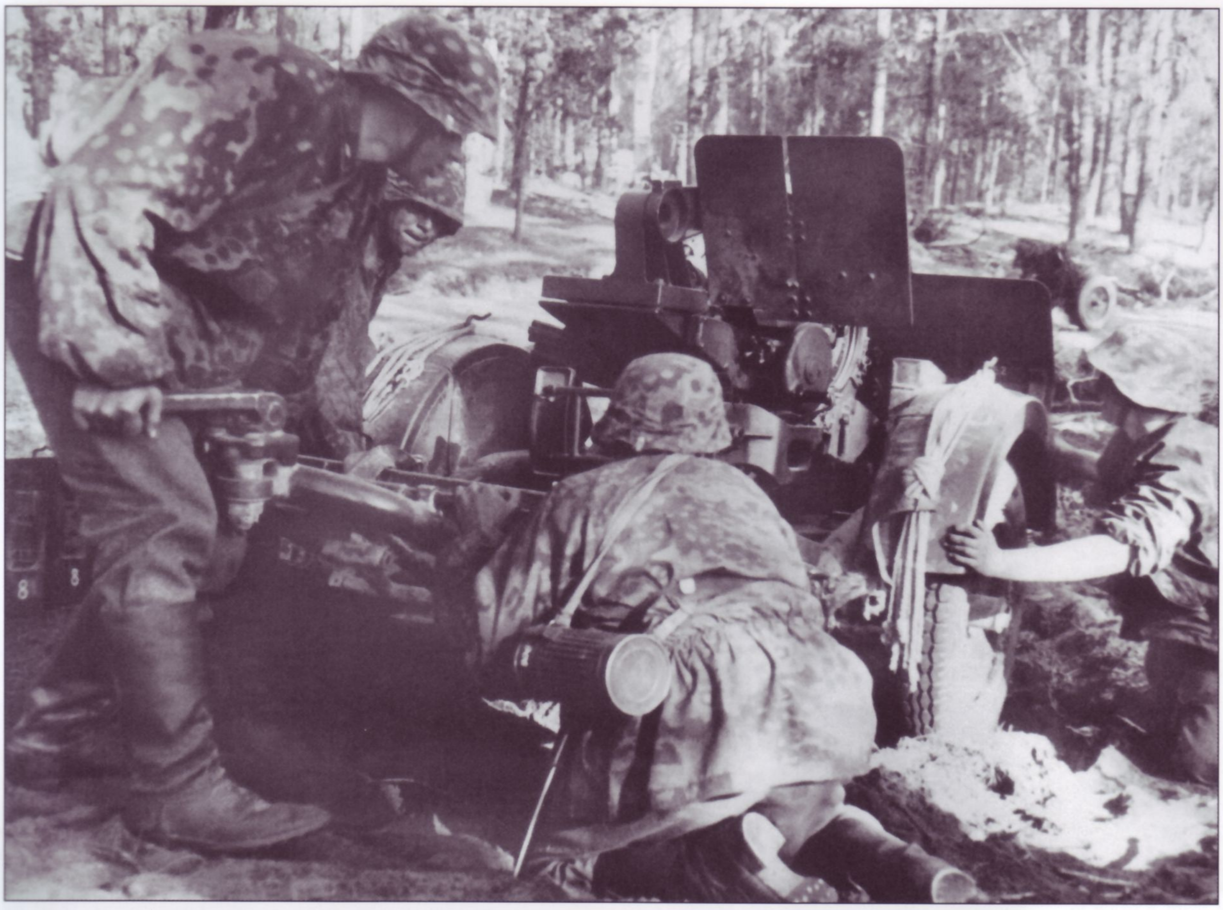
An MG34 machine-gun sweeps the field in front of an SS unit position, August 1941. The leather case on the gunner's belt is a spigot-type rifle grenade launcher case, which held the launcher, sight, disassembly wrench, and bore brush. The white stripe on the man's shoulder to the right identifies him as an NCO. On camouflage clothing one strip identified NCOs, two company officers, and three majors and up. This system was used prior to the introduction of the green-on-black rank-specific shoulder stripes for camouflage clothing.



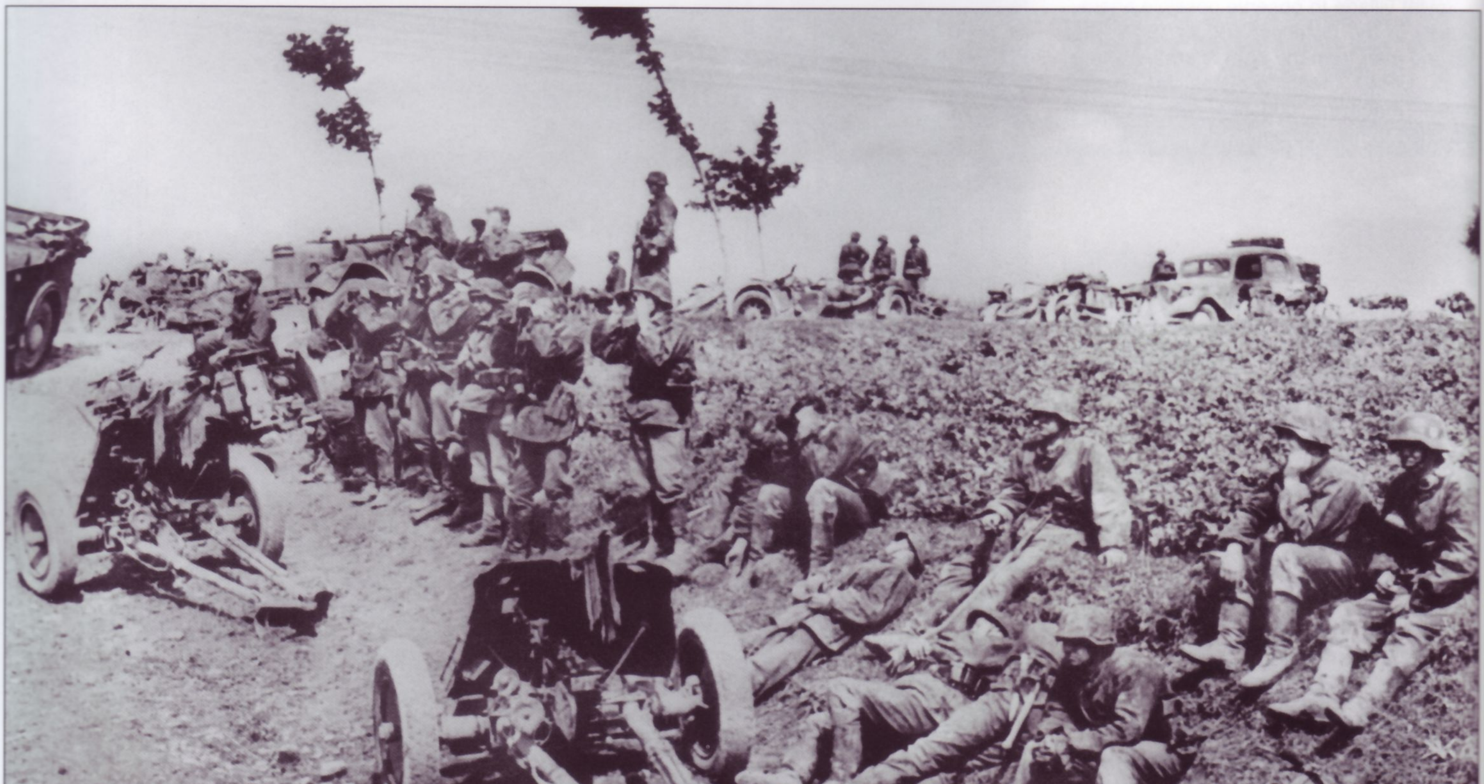
Waffen-SS troops dismount from a truck in a Soviet village to observe possible enemy activity in the distance, August 1941. The second man from the right is armed with a 9mm MP40 machine-pistol; his three-pocket magazine pouches can be seen attached to his web gear.



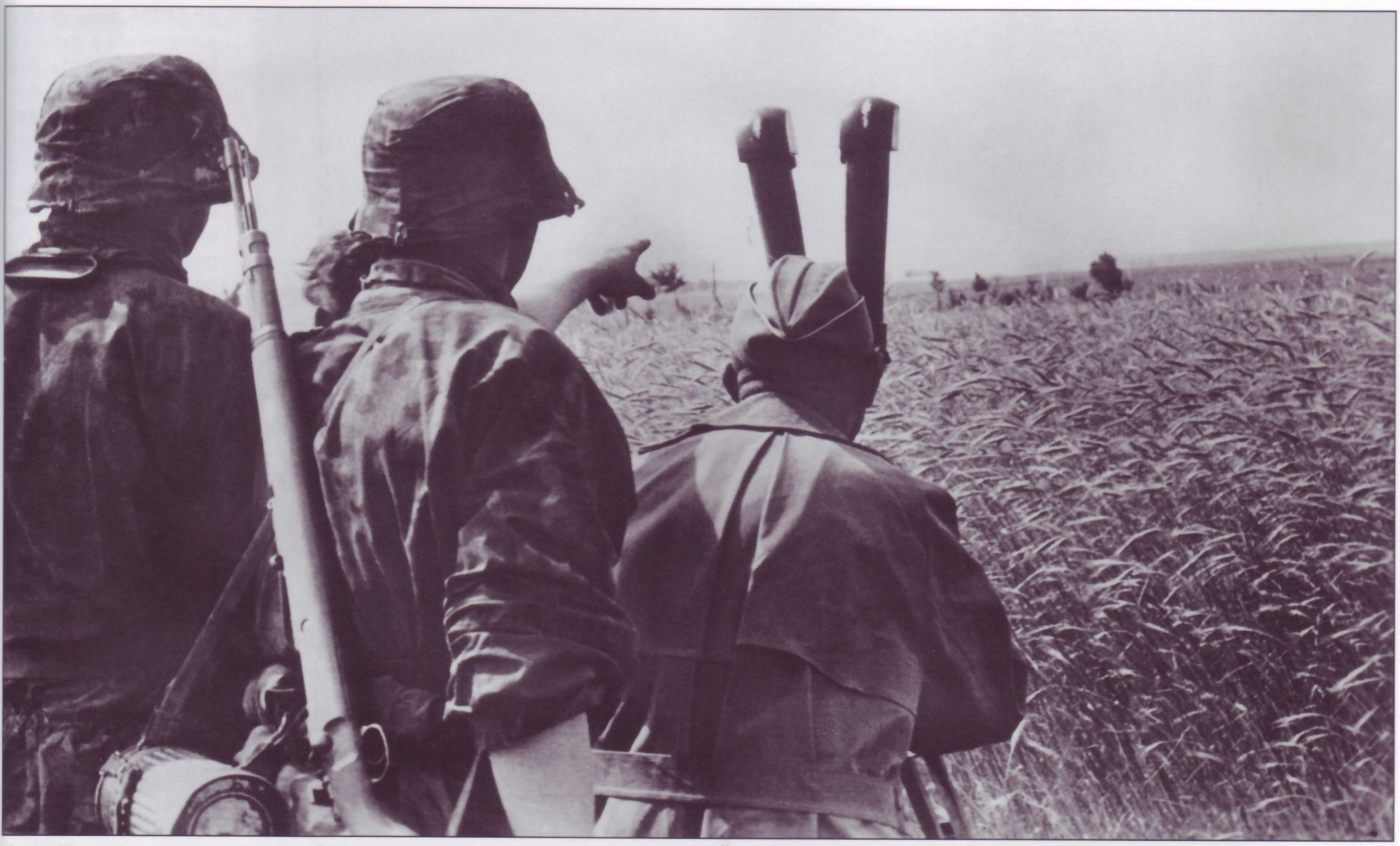
"Totenkopf" Division reconnaissance soldiers remove TMi35 Tellerminen from their steel carriers for emplacement, August 1941. The term "teller" means "plate", which described the mine's shape. A white "Totenkopf" emblem can be seen on the fender of the truck at right.



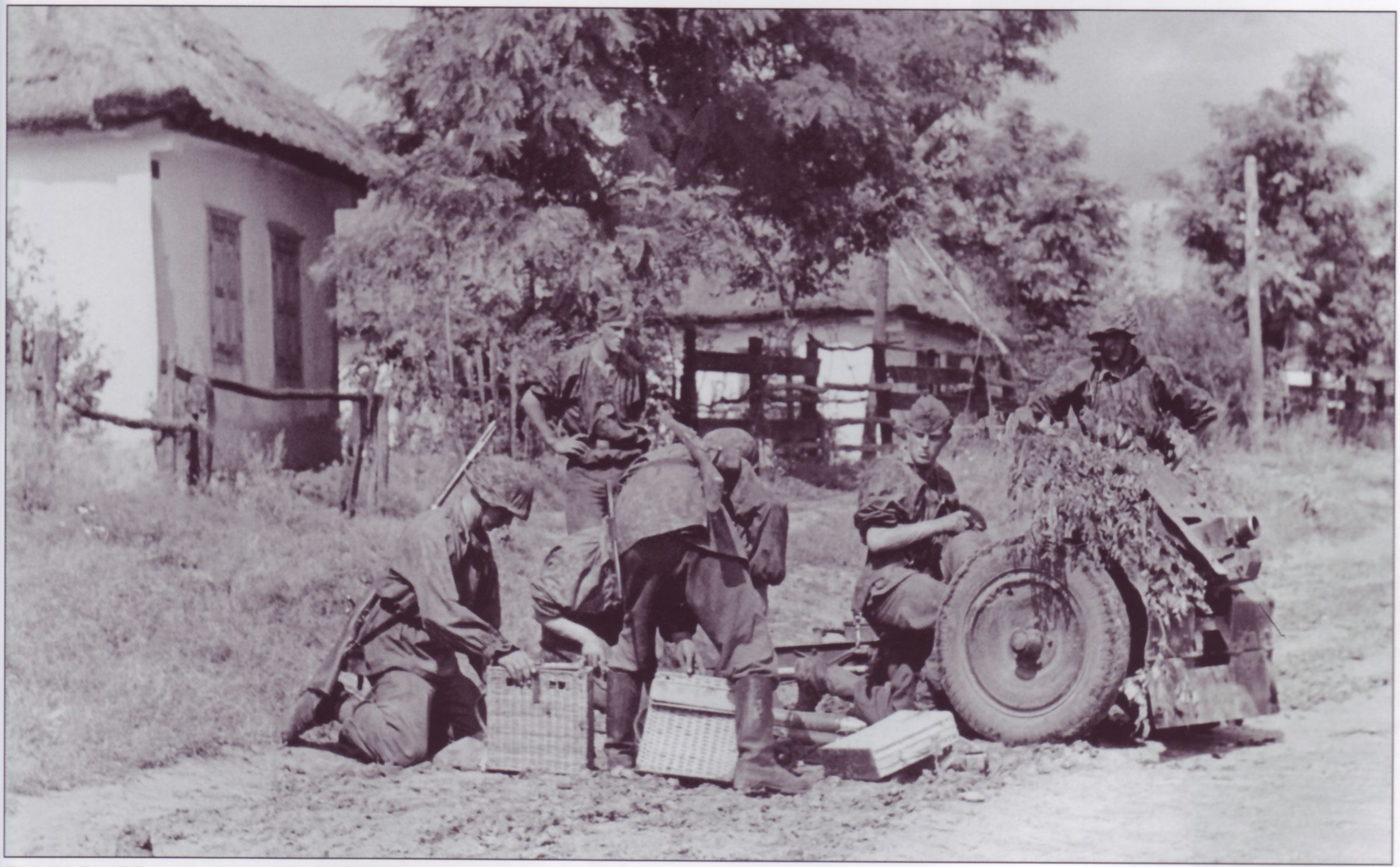
The crew of a 2cm FlaK38 anti-aircraft gun (probably from the "Totenkopf" Division) manhandle it into position. The gun was normally emplaced after being detached from its two-wheel Sd.Ah.51 carriage. Besides air-defense, these light weapons (which fired both high-explosive-tracer and armor-piercing-tracer ammunition) were used against ground targets to include personnel, field fortifications, and light armored vehicles.



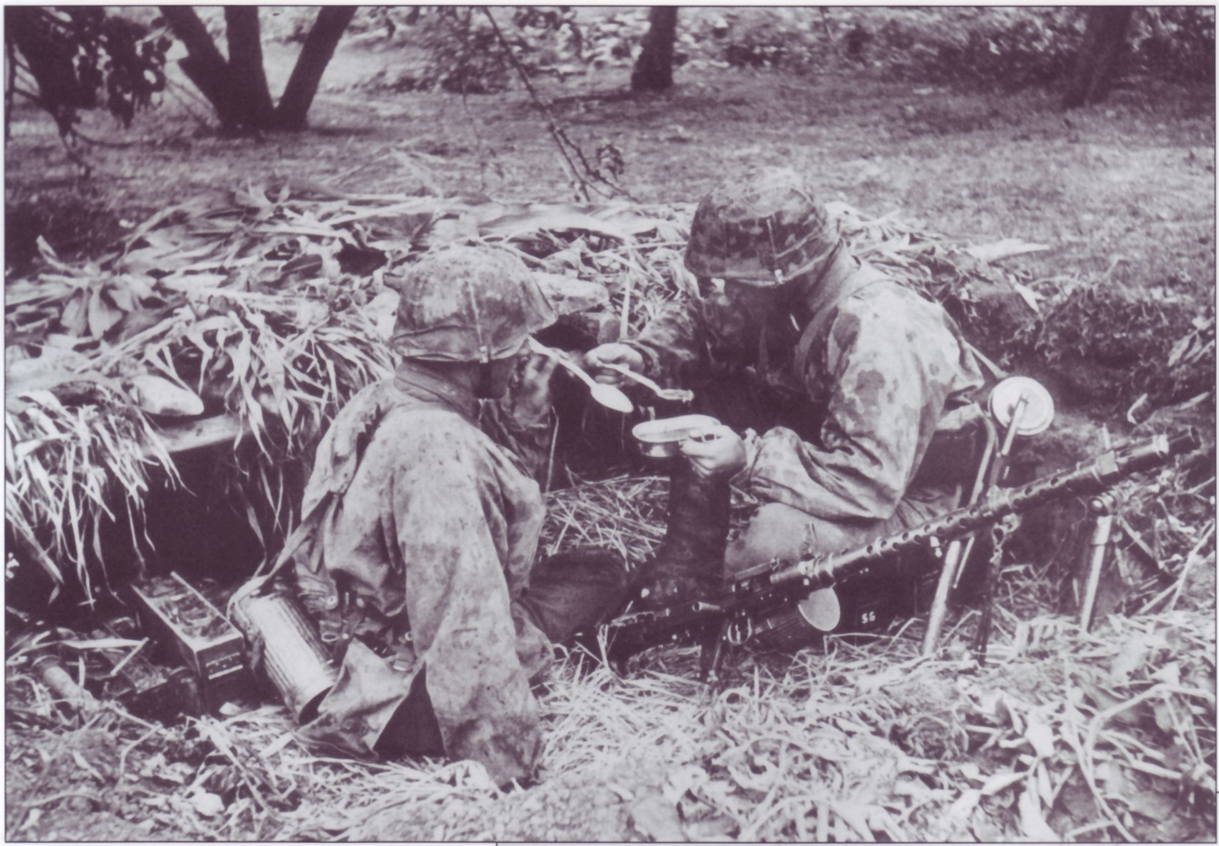
Troops of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung "Wiking", assigned to SS-Division "Wiking", rest as they make their way into Russia. The "Wiking" Division was comprised largely of Danish, Norwegian, Dutch, and Flemish troops as well as Germans. The artillery pieces in the foreground are 3.7cm Pak36 anti-tank guns, the standard German antitank weapon. The white "K" on the motorcycle indicates the unit was assigned to Panzergruppe von Kleist in the southern USSR.



An artillery observer searches for a target hidden in a vast field of wheat, August 1941, somewhere in Russia. The observer is using a 6x30 Sf.14Z scissors periscope. The oval object on the back of the soldier's neck to the left is a leather eyepiece cover for binoculars. Attached to the carrying srtap they were often pushed out of the way to the back. The man in the center carries a Kar98k carbine, but this being a Waffen-SS unit, it could just as well be license-produced copies made in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, or Austria.

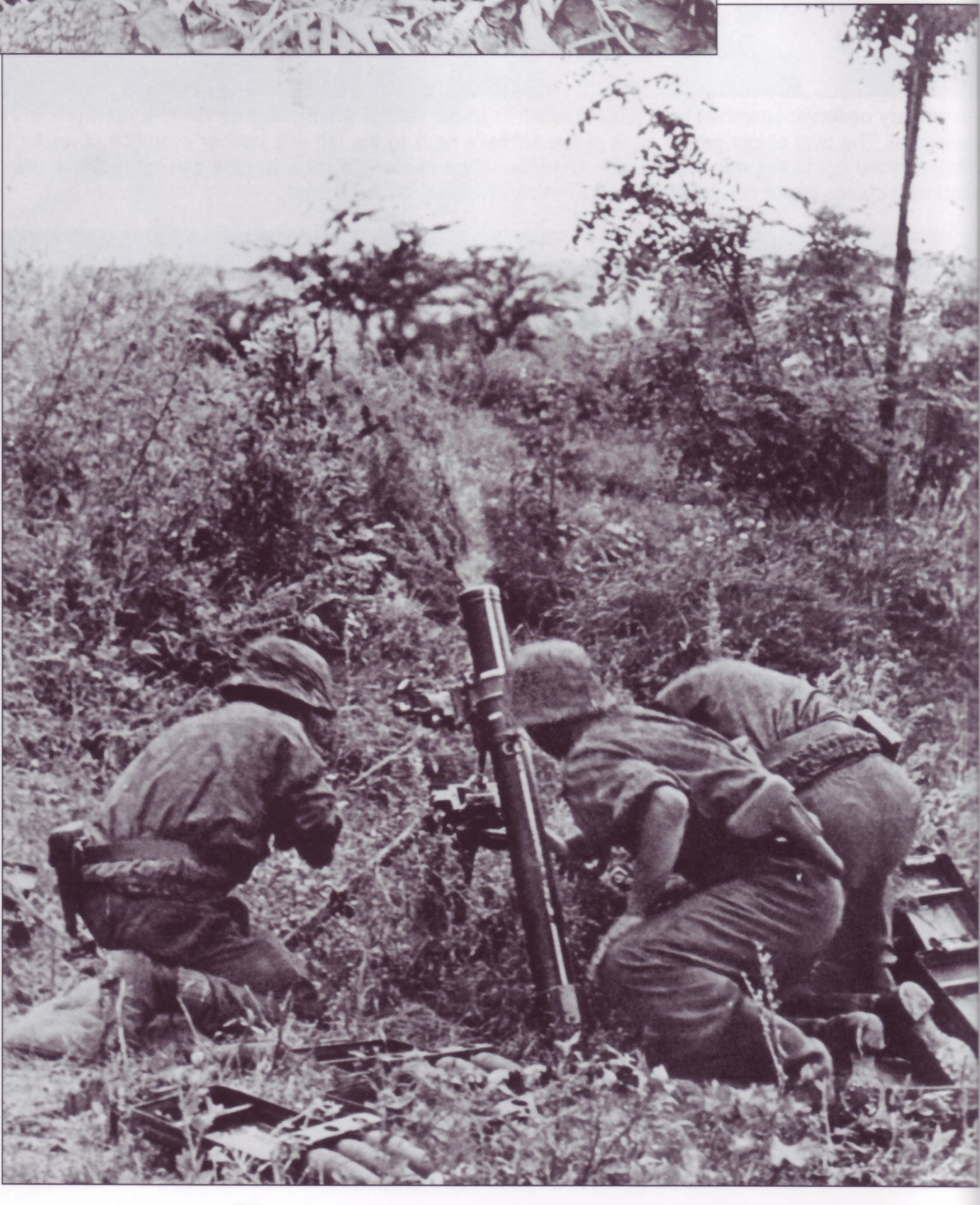


The Waffen-SS crew of this 7.5cm l.IG18 prepare to open fire. This version had the rubber tires, which were optimized for motor vehicle towing. The ammunition is carried in wicker containers each holding four rounds. Their individual weapons are 7.92mm Gew98 rifles.



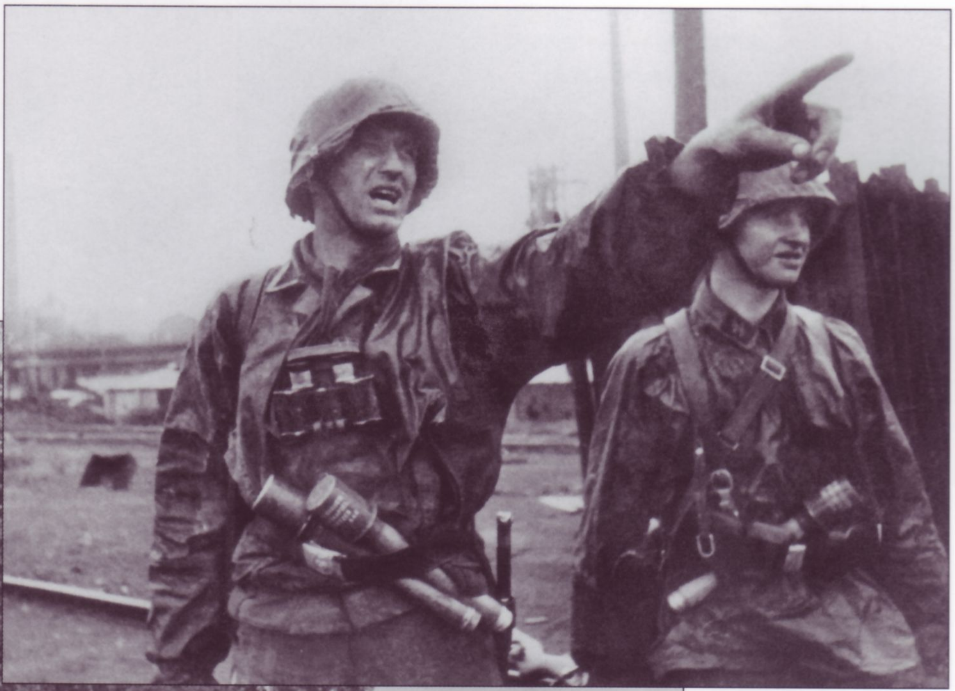
An MG34 crew shares a meal from a mess kit lid, August 1941. The gun is fitted with a 50-round basket magazine. A plank-covered sleeping compartment has been constructed in the rear of the position. The position's parapet has been camouflaged with vegetation mainly to prevent it being detected by aerial photography in which freshly-turned earth appears vividly white against a gray background.

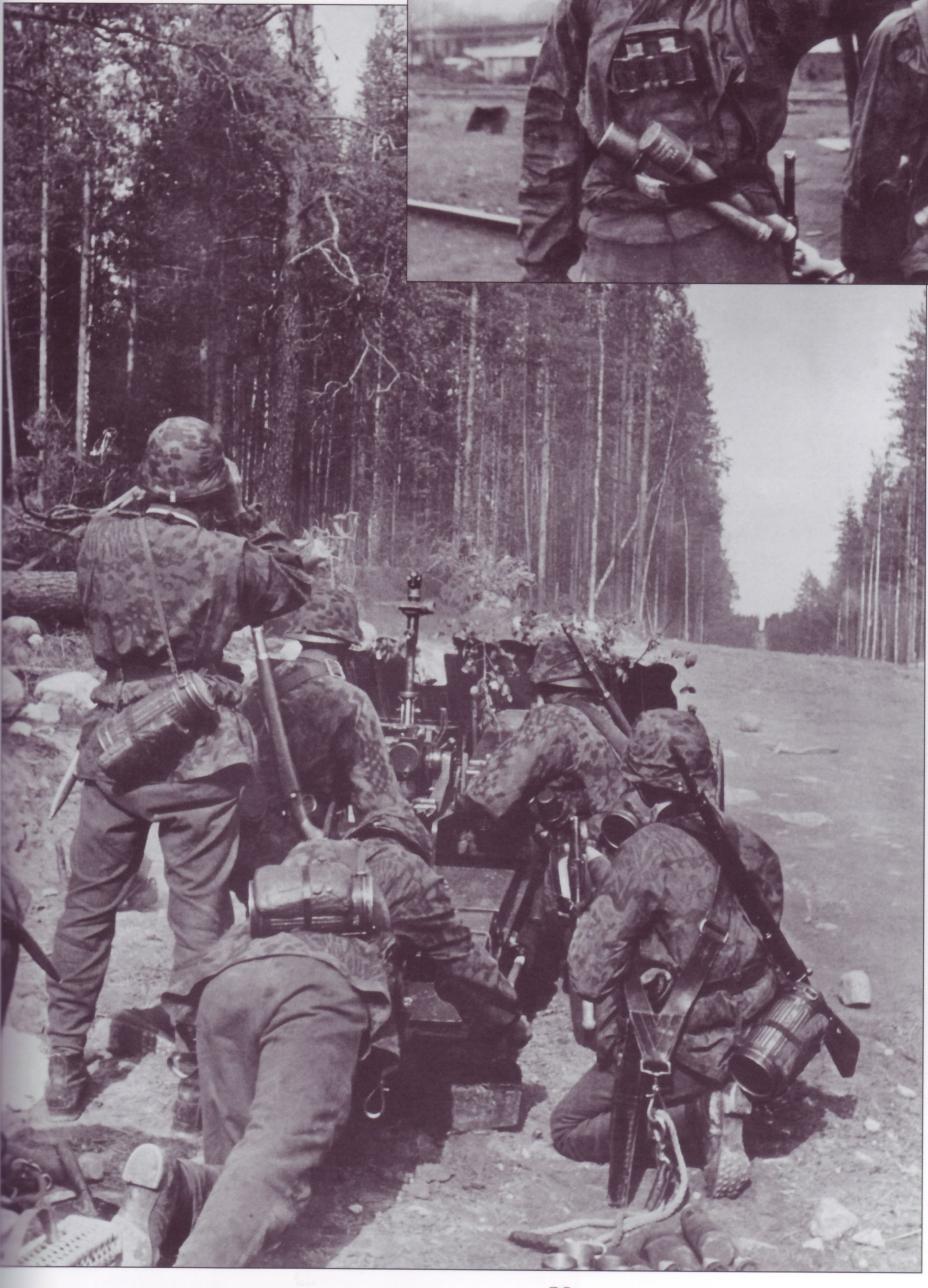
Theodor Wisch, (shown here with the rank of Obersturmbannführer), received his Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross as a Sturmbannführer on 15 September 1941, while commanding the II.Bataillon (mot.), SS-Motorisiert-Brigade "LAH". His entire career was in the "LAH", which he joined in 1933 as one of the first volunteers. He became the commander of the "LAH" Division in July of 1943.



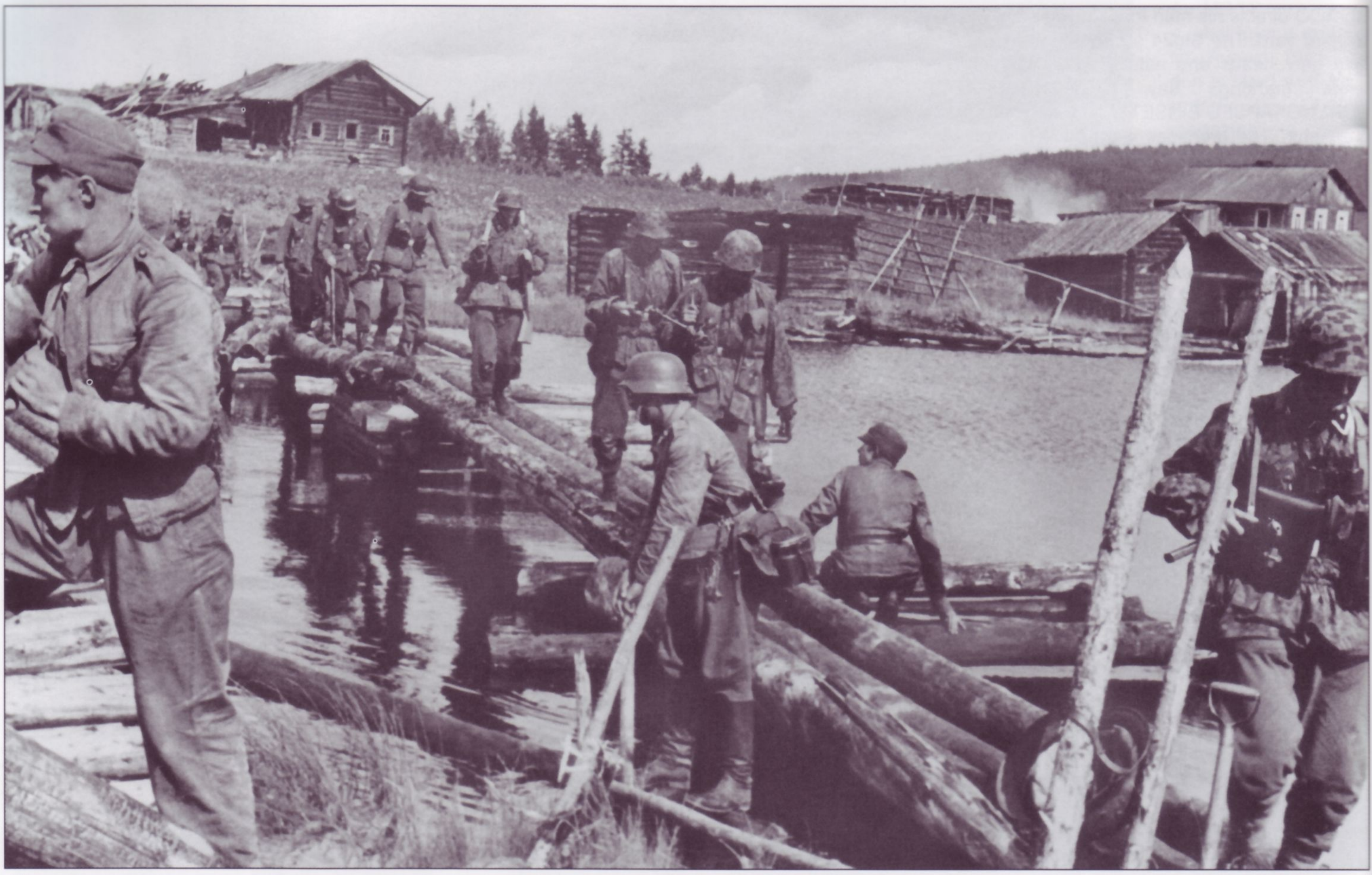
An 8cm GrW34 mortar team opens fire on a Soviet position. The back-up white sighting alignment strip can be seen painted on the mortar's overall field grey-colored tube. The ammunition boxes are also painted field gray; each held four maroon-colored bombs. Most mortar crewmen were armed with pistols.

An NCO directs his men forward while battling in a railroad yard. The Stg24 stick hand grenades had field gray heads and natural wood handles. The white markings say, "VOR GEBRAUCH SPRENGKAPSEL EINSETZEN-"Before use insert detonator." The grenades were packed in pressed metal carrying cases with the detonators in a separate compartment.

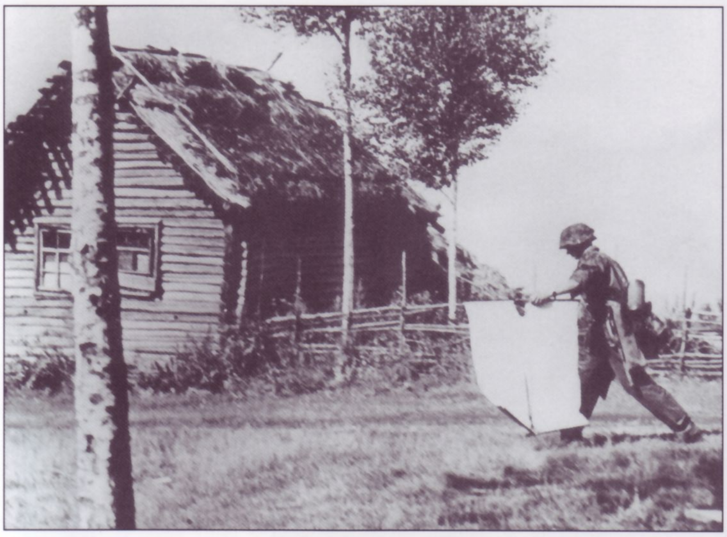




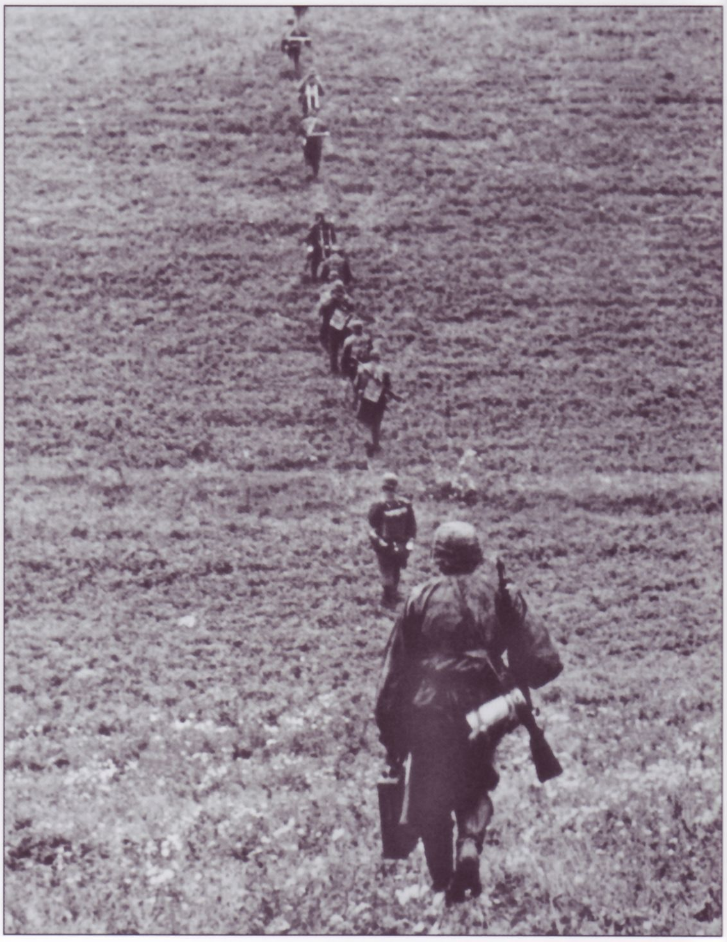
An SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" 7.5cm l.IG18 crew place direct fire on an enemy position in Finland's Karelian Forest, September 1941. The irregular "wavy" shield edge is designed to hide the gun's silhouette by eliminating straight edges. The two crewmen to the right have leather hauling slings (Schleppriemen) slung over their shoulders; the large carbine hook at the strap's end is attached to pulling ropes on the gun for manhandling. Note how one man helps steady the trails, since apparently the gun has gone into action too quickly for it to be properly emplaced.



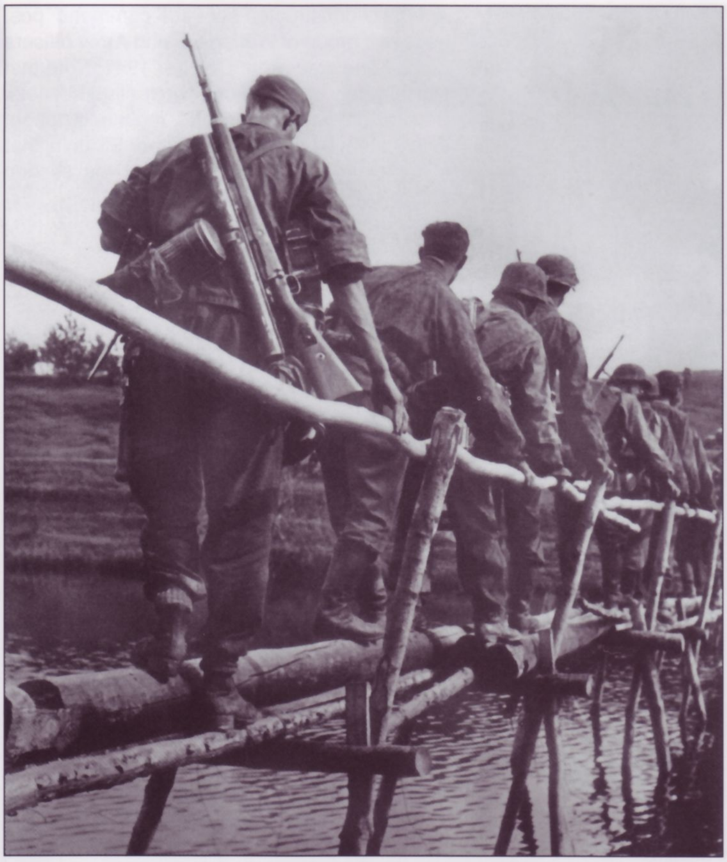
"Nord" Division pioneer troops have constructed a hasty footbridge over a Finnish river. The SS-Unterscharführer on the extreme right has leather pouches holding four 32-round MP28/II machine-pistol magazines. The second man on the bridge carries a four-pocket bandoleer holding eight 25-round magazines for a 7.92mm MG13. This obsolete light machine-gun was also used by the Army (and was the main armament of the Pz.Kpfw. I) until replaced by the MG34.

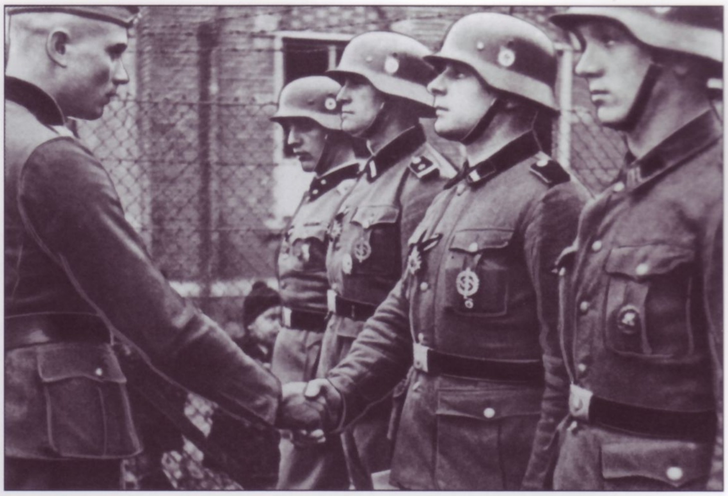


A Waffen-SS soldier moves forward to emplace a ground-to-air marker panel, so supporting Luftwaffe aircraft can identify the front line of friendly troops, September 1941.



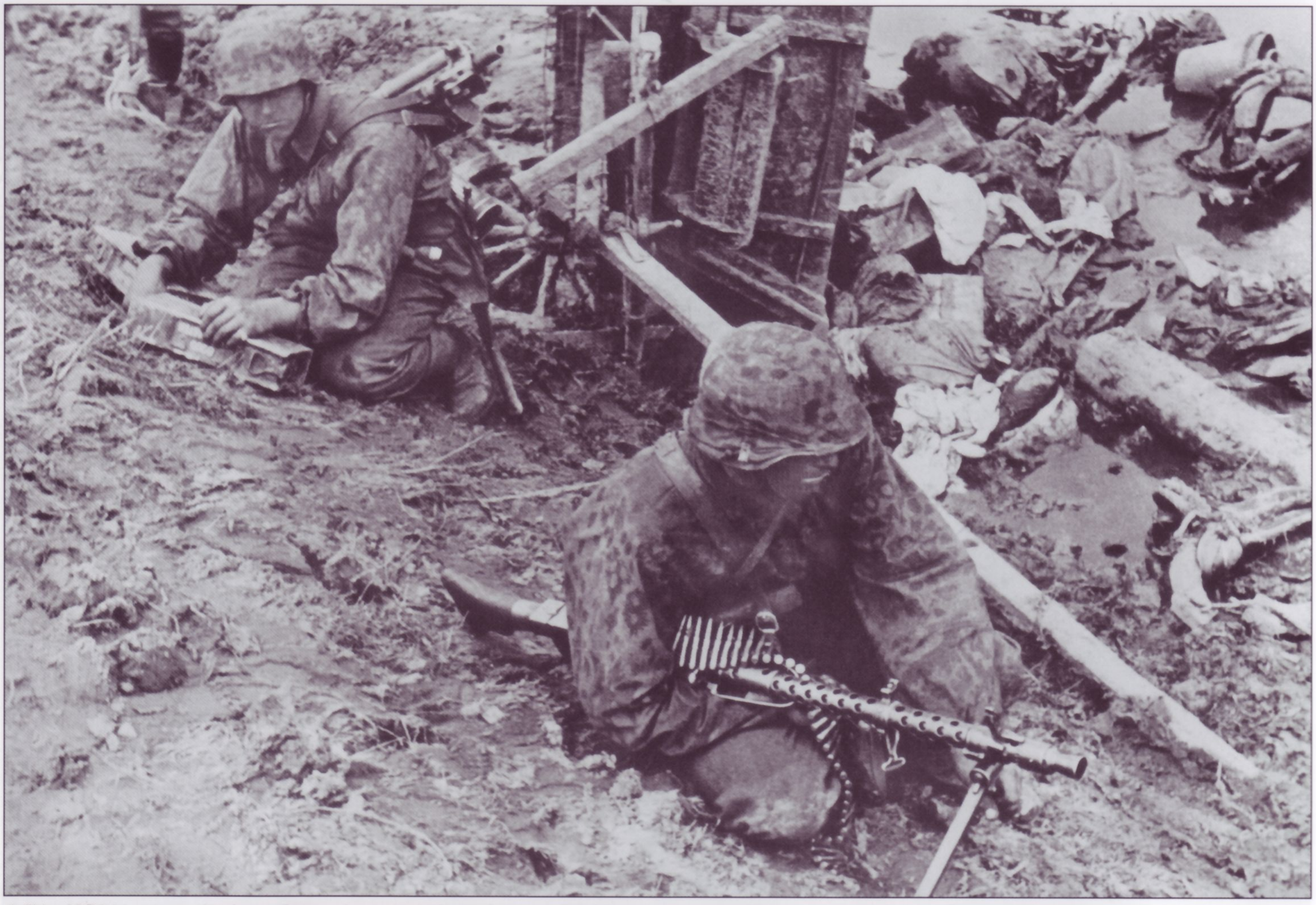
A well-dispersed column of Waffen-SS troops cross the rolling steppes of Russia. This is a heavy machine-gun unit as can be seen by the folded tripods on some men's backs. The last man carries a stick hand grenade case holding 15 grenades.



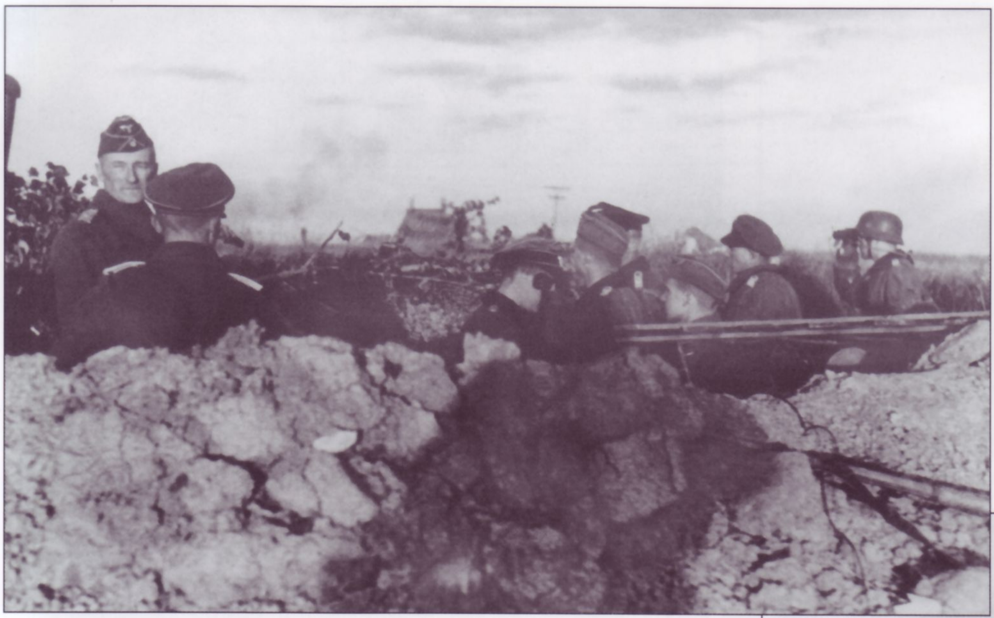


Waffen-SS soldiers from different units are presented the new "Kriegsverdienstkreuz" (War Merit Cross), which was mainly awarded to non-combatants such as rear service, administrative, and higher headquarters troops. Combat troops referred to it as the "Feldküchensturmabzeichen" (Field Kitchen Assault Badge). From left to right in this heavily-retouched propaganda photograph, their ranks are: Oberscharführer (he lacks collar braid), SS-Führer Bewerber, and two SS-Rottenführer.

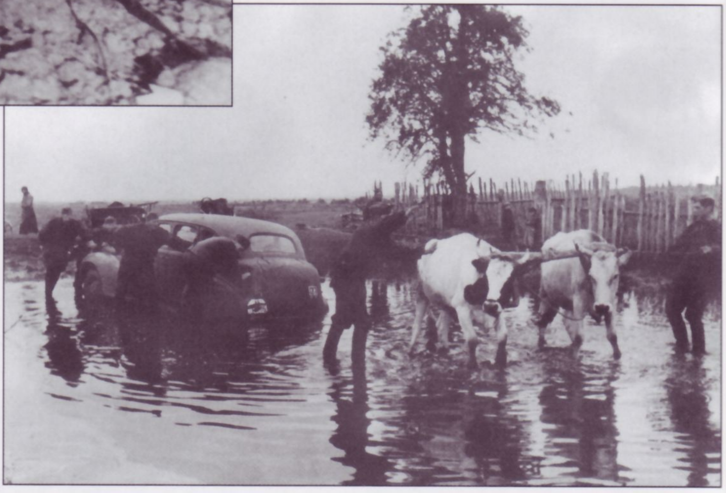
A machine-gun team crosses a Russian river on a hastily-erected footbridge, September 1941. Note that the notches on the near log, indicating that it may have been removed from a peasant's cabin. The rear man carries a MG34 spare barrel container (there was also a two-barrel carrier), as well as a Kar98k.



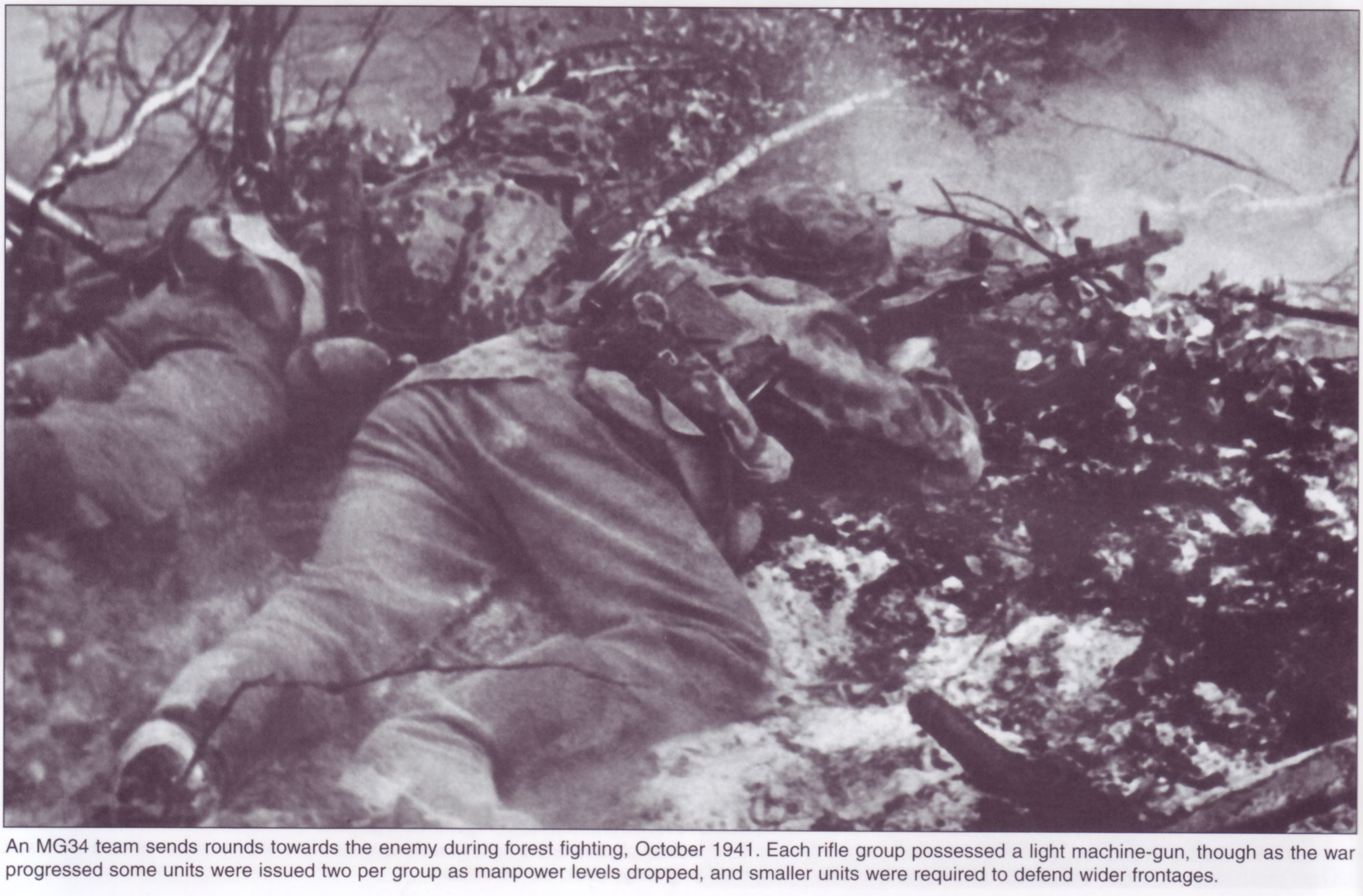
A filthy MG34 team awaits the order to advance, as they take cover beside an overturned Russian refugee's cart, October 1941. The soldier in the rear carries the sustained-fire tripod and two ammunition boxes, a heavy load. In fluid tactical situations the heavy machine-guns were often pushed forward and used as light machine-guns, especially in built-up areas and forests where their long range could not be utilized.



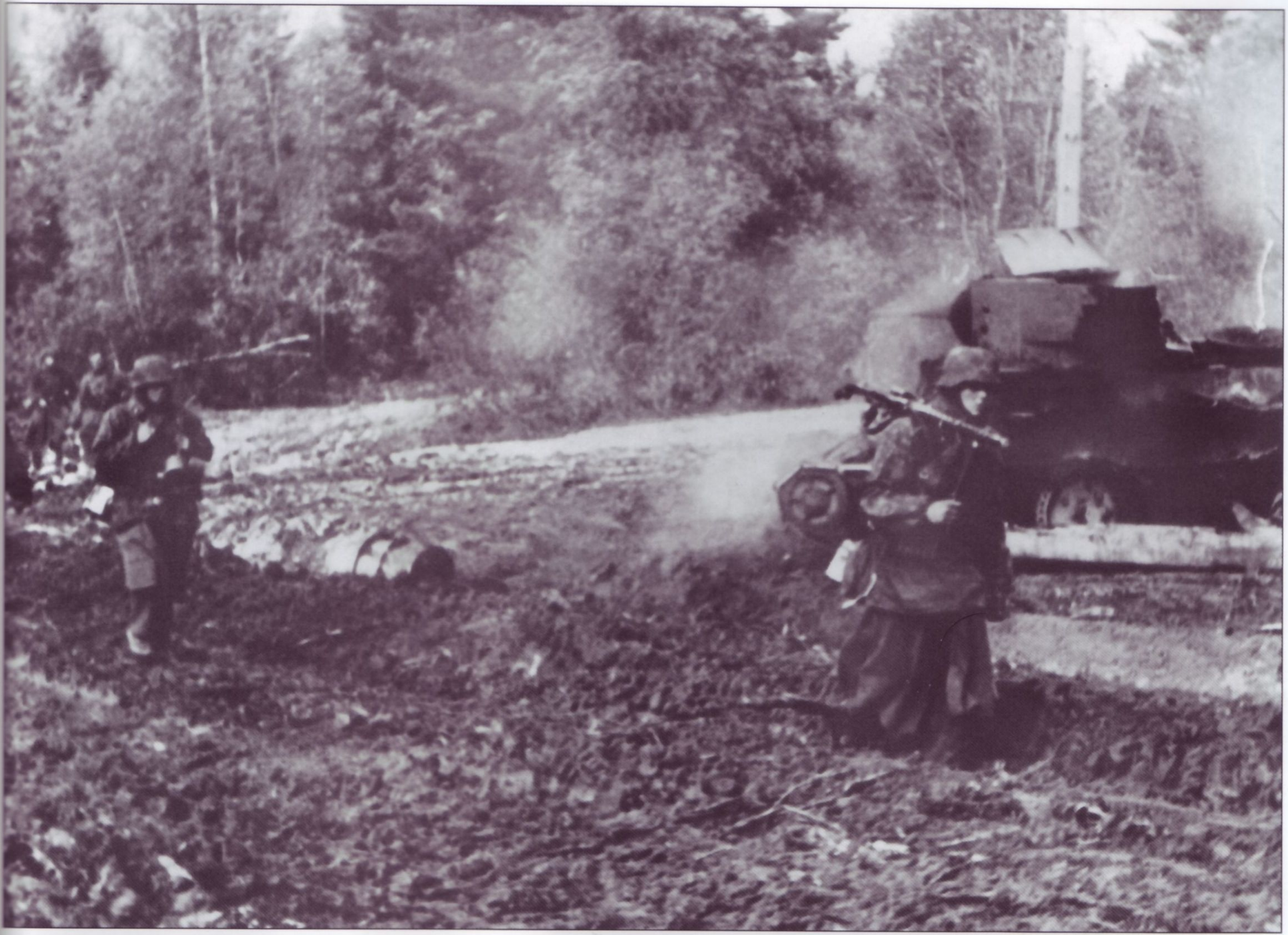
A hastily-constructed forward command post houses a group of Waffen-SS and Army officers in the Leningrad area, October 1941. Note that typically, few of the officers wear steel helmets. Several different "Totenkopf" regiments fought in this area, having replaced other SS units that suffered heavy losses throughout the second half of 1941.



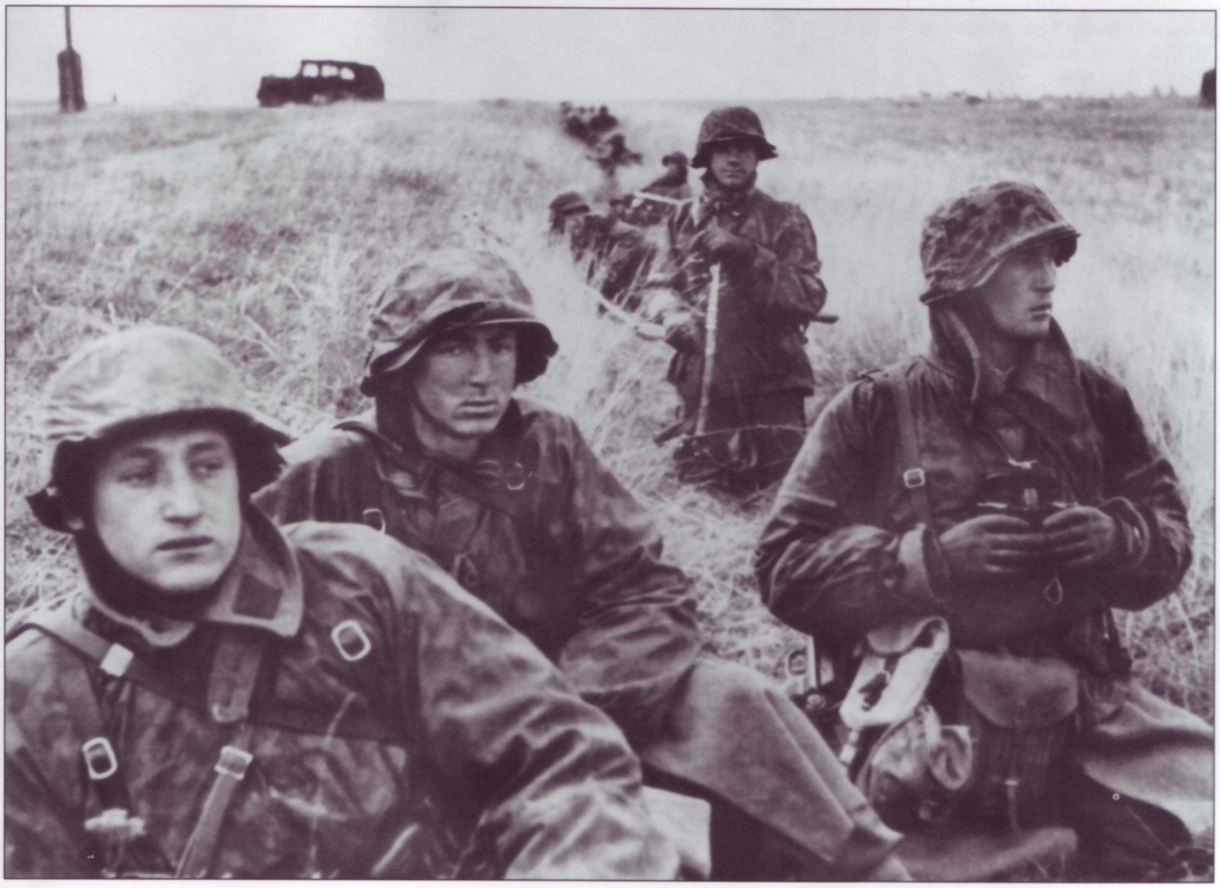
September brought the "Rasputitza" (a Russian term describing the "big rain" and the mud that resulted), the autum rains, which inundated the countryside. The un-surfaced roads, which were battered by heavy vehicle traffic, were turned into rivers of mud. Here, a pair of cows, hardly suitable draft animals, have been commendeerd from a nearby village to haul a stuck staff car out of a large puddle.



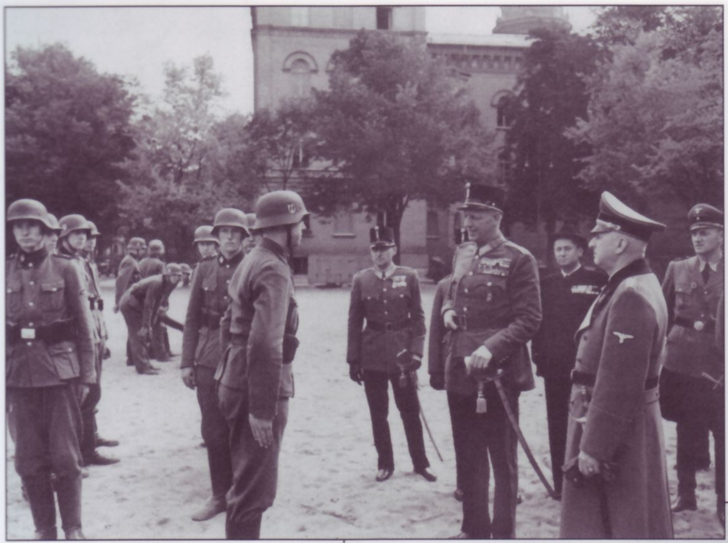
An MG34 team sends rounds towards the enemy during forest fighting, October 1941. Each rifle group possessed a light machine-gun, though as the war progressed some units were issued two per group as manpower levels dropped, and smaller units were required to defend wider frontages.



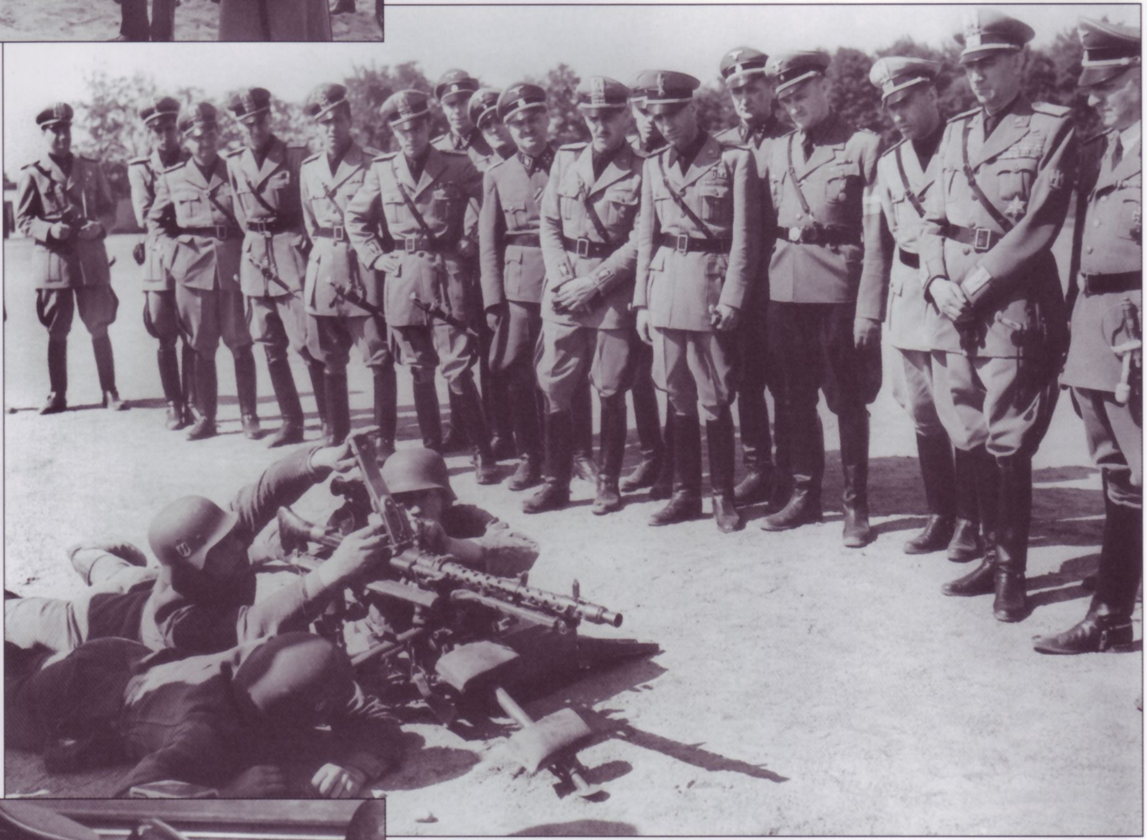
A machine-gun team trudges past a burning Soviet BT-7 light tank armed with a 45mm gun, late October 1941. Note that the machine-gunner is wearing a camouflage smock over his greatcoat and a wool toque beneath his helmet, but lacks gloves.



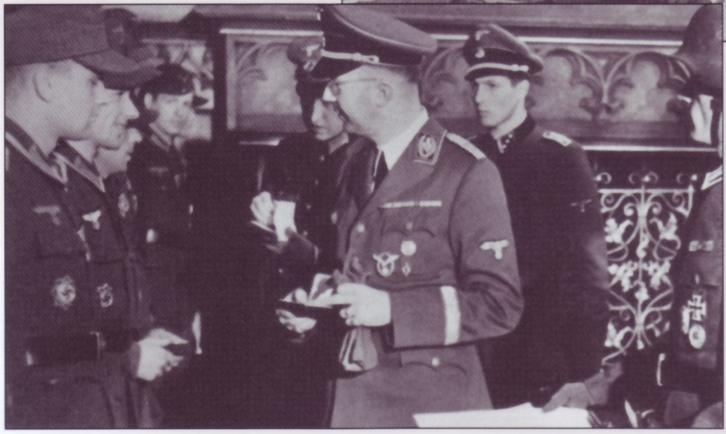
Obviously exhausted troops pause during their advance into Russia. They wear their camouflage smocks over their greatcoats. The two men to the right are armed with 9mm MP40 machine-pistols.



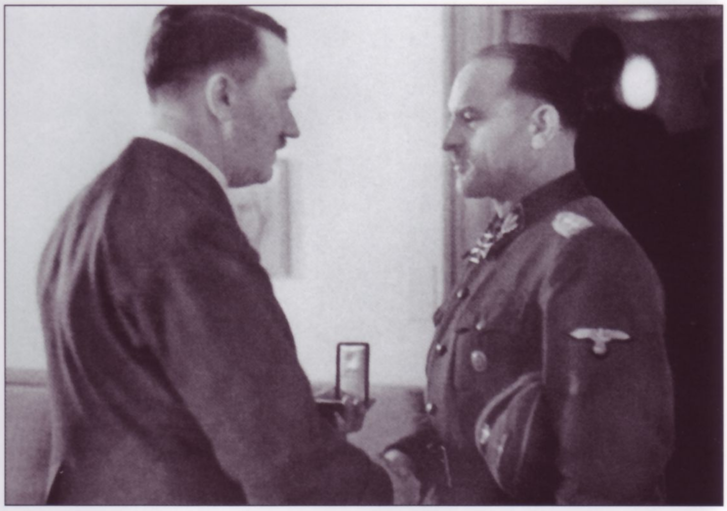
Vezerörnagy (Bridadier General) Altabornagy Alajos Beldy heads a group of Hungarian embassy officers and officials inspecting the "LAH" Kaserne at Lechterfelde in September 1941. The Hungarian officer speaks to young recruits undertaking basic training.



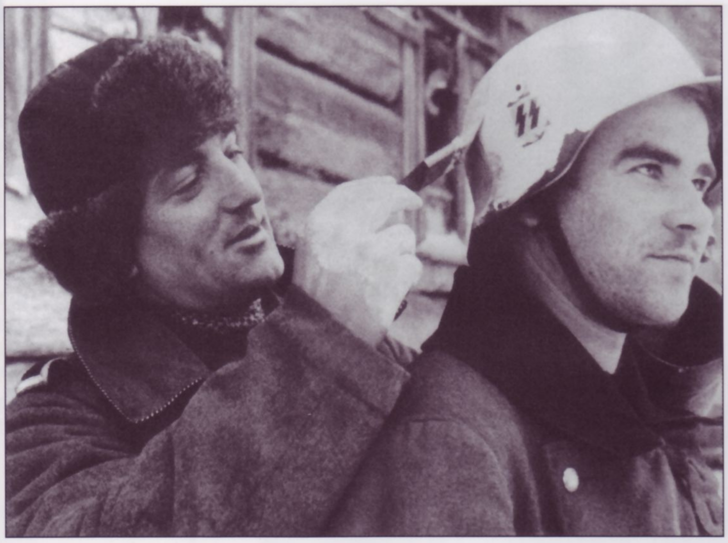
General Rozzeni heads a delegation of Italian officers watching an SS-Ersatz-Abteilung "LAH" heavy machine-gun crew place an MG34 into action, summer 1941. The two pads on the tripod provided a level of comfort to the soldier who carried it on his back.



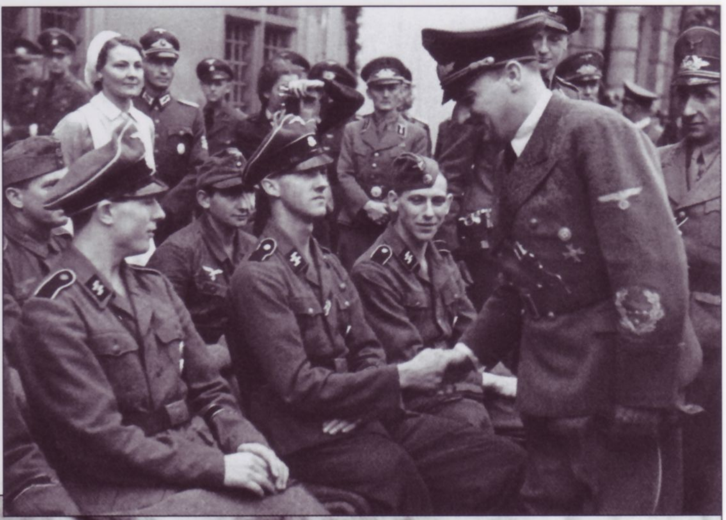
Himmler, seen here with his adjutants, presents awards to Army soldiers. The two men to the left wear the German Cross in Gold (Deutsches Kreuz) on their right breast pockets, an award intended to bridge the gap between the Iron Cross 1st Class and the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. It was known as the "Spiegelei" (Fried Egg) because of its large white disc and surrounding gold sunburst design. It was also known as the "Hitler Spiegelei" because of the dominating swastika. Late in the war when additional Waffen-SS divisions were quickly raised, many Army NCOs were seconded to them in order to provide the necessary small unit leadership and training skills.



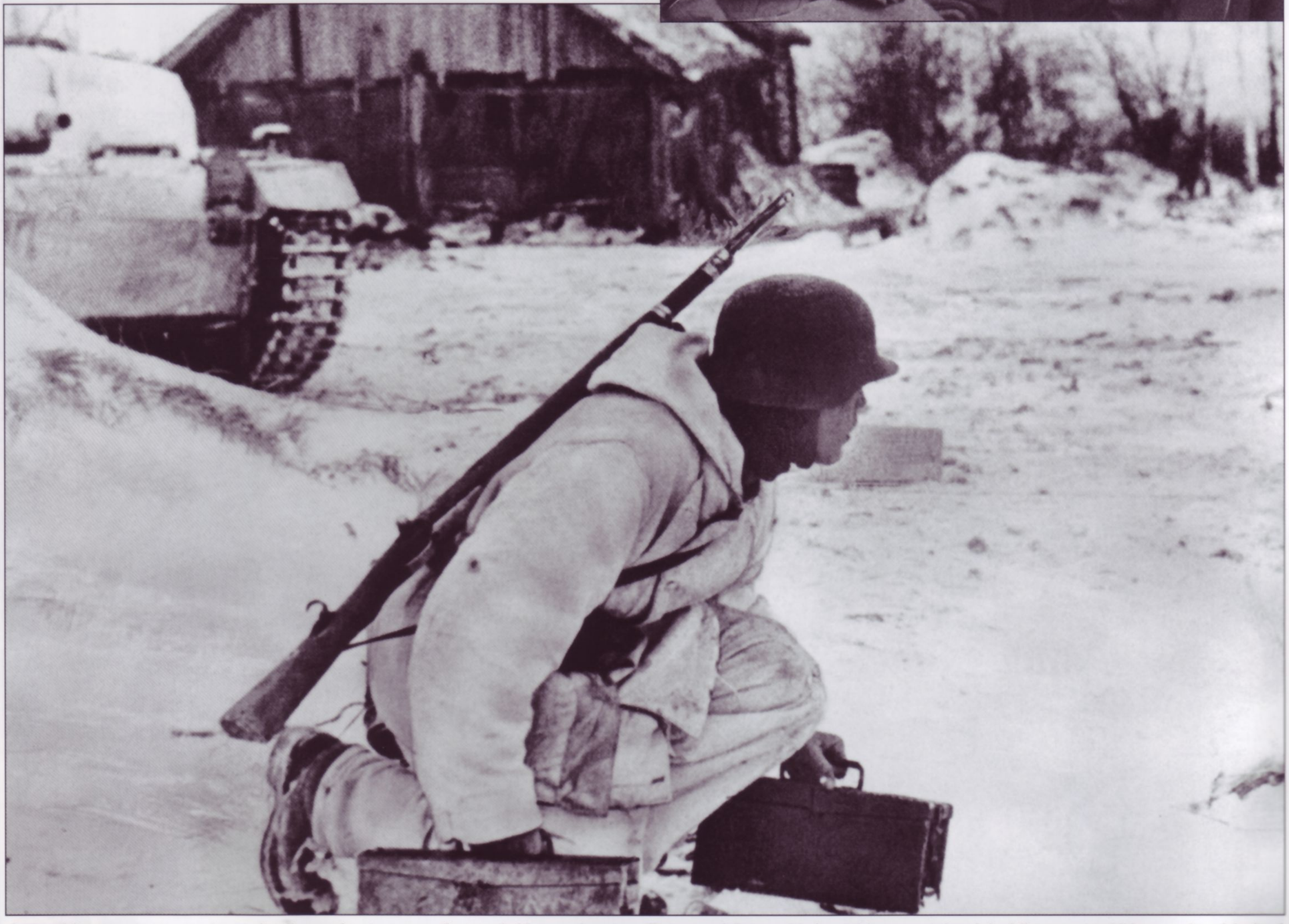
Adolf Hitler greets "Sepp" Dietrich during one of his visits to the Führer's Headquarters in January 1942. On this occasion, Dietrich received personally from Hitler, a new order for field service for the "LAH". At the time his division was involved in positional warfare in Russia, west of Rostov.



At the beginning of 1942 the war of movement on the Ostfront was stalled, owing to the severity of the winter and its subsequent impact on the operations of both sides. Steel helmets were often whitewashed for snow camouflage; here a rather sloppy job is being done of it. The painter wears the outdated black and white twisted collar piping and a Russian fur cap.



After the heavy losses of 1941, the growth of the Waffen-SS was stabilized until late 1942. At that time, new divisions were raised and older ones were assigned trained replacements, new recruits, and previously wounded soldiers returning to active service. Convalescent hospitals had been established in Poland rather than retuning many of the wounded to Germany to reduce transportation needs. Here recovering SS soldiers in Poland are greeted by Nazi Governor Hans Frank. Frank administered the "General Gouvernment", the name applied to what remained of central Poland by the Nazis after they and the Soviets annexed most of the country in 1939.



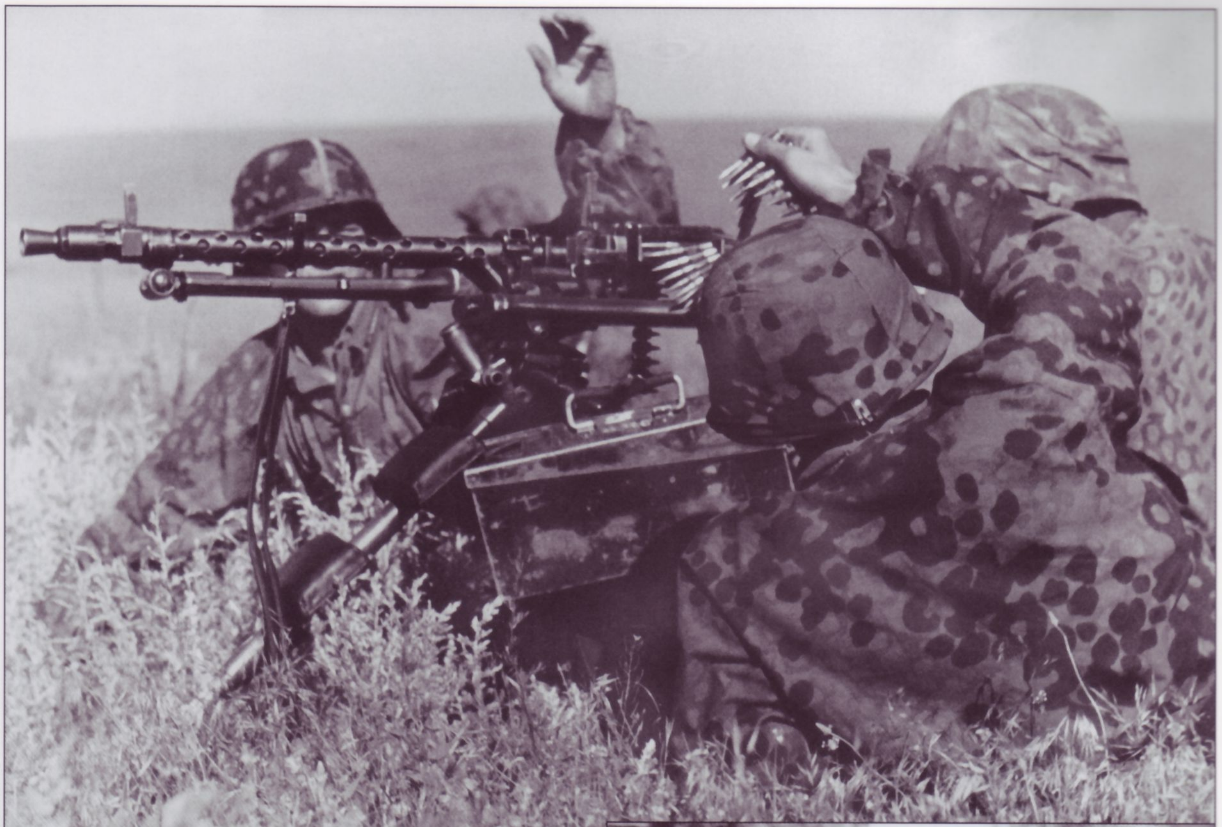
A machine gun crewman awaits the order to move forward. He carries two Patronenkästen 41 (cartridge container) holding up to 300 rounds of belted ammunition. He is armed with a Mauser 7.92mm Kar98k carbine. A 7.5cm StuG III Sturmgeschütz (assault gun) covers his unit's advance. The German soldier called this a "StuG," derived from its abbreviation.

A deceased high-ranking member of the Waffen-SS receives a military funeral with full honors. His orders and medals are displayed before his casket. Most Waffen-SS officers killed in combat were simply buried the in field.

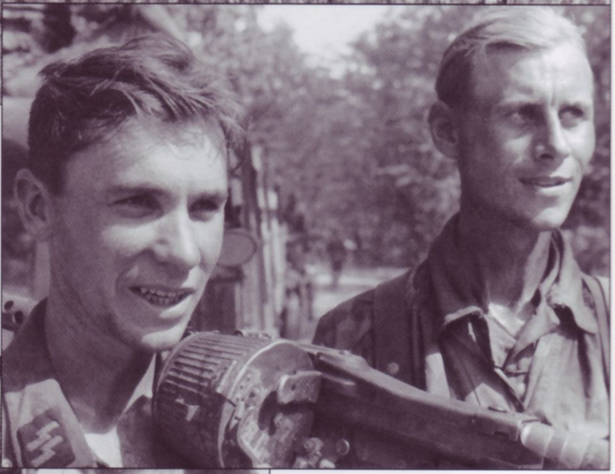
Count Christian Frederik von Schalburg, commander of the Friekorps Danmark (Danish Volunteer Legion) is seen in 1942. Standing in ranks before him are recruits representing various Western European countries, who commonly believed they were supporting the fight against communism.

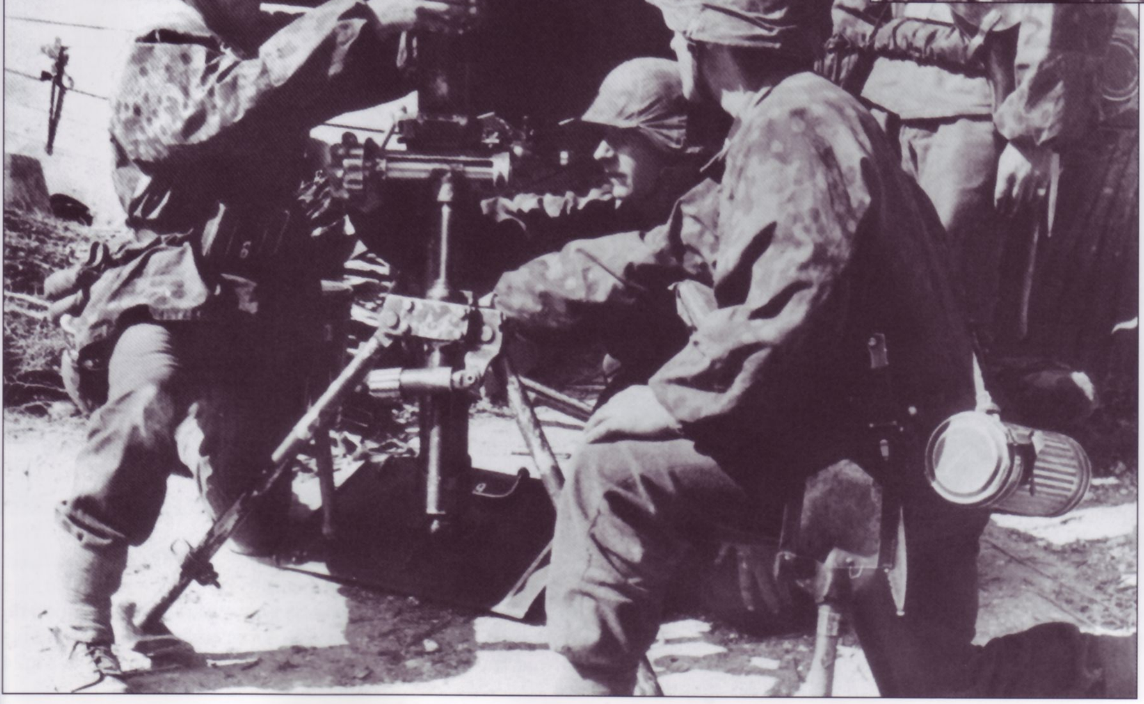
Max Seela shakes hands with the commander of a unit relieving the "Totenkopf" Division in April 1942. The division had endured long months of encirclement at Demyansk.

A "Wiking" Division MG34 team trains with their weapon on the barren Russian steppes close to the Azov Sea, June 1942. In the heavy machine-gun role on a tripod, the MG34 had an effective range of over 1000 meters. Even though the faster-firing MG42 began to be issued in late 1942, the proven MG34 remained in production and use to the war's end.

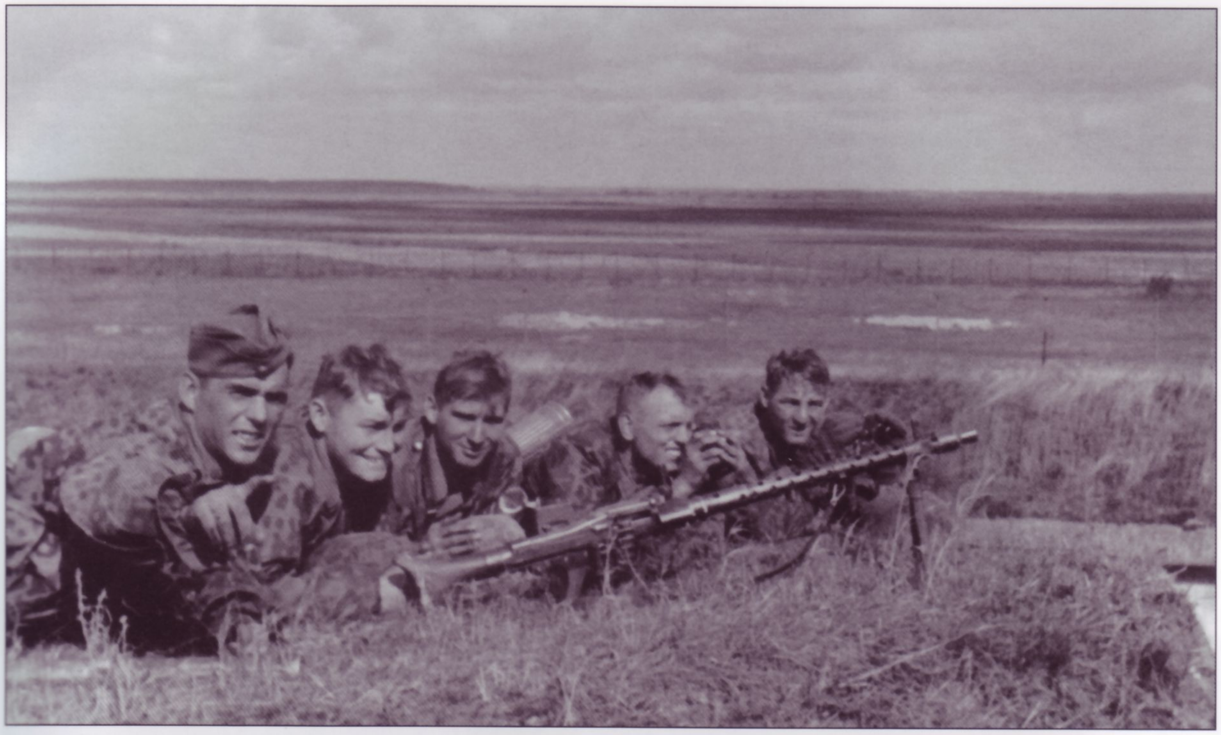


This MG34 is fitted with a basket magazine containing a 50-round belt. The SS collar tab is the little used subdued field-gray-on-black version. Earlier and more widely used versions were either silver or white.

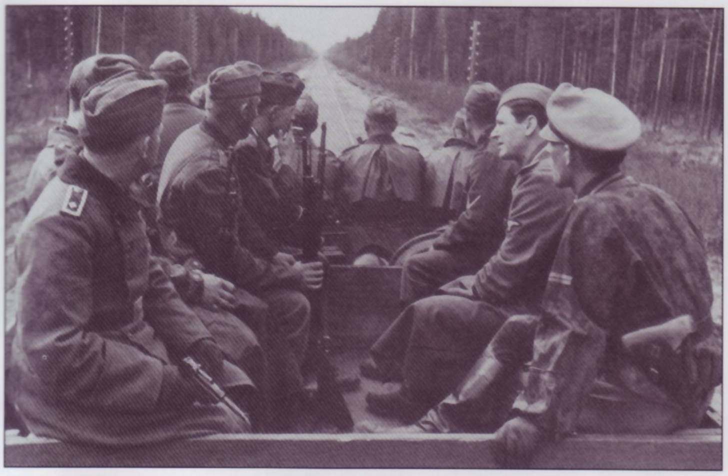




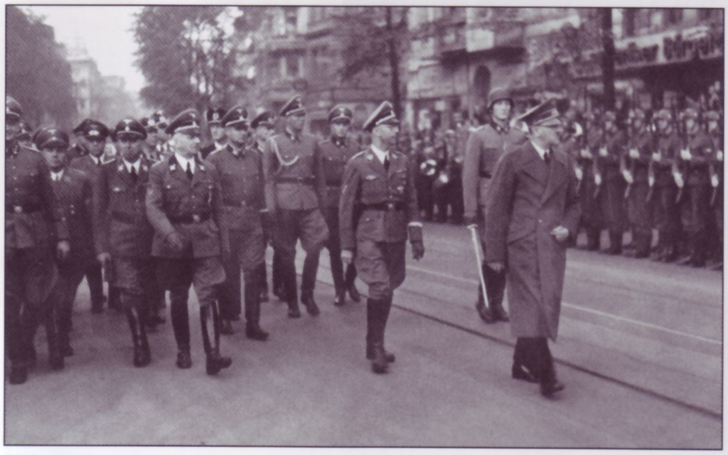
The 8cm GrW34 (shown here) had previously been designated a heavy mortar, but was now re-classified as a medium mortar once captured Soviet 120mm HM-38 mortars were pressed into German service as the 12cm GrW378(r). These mainly replaced the more costly and heavier 7.5cm l.IG18 infantry guns; the Germans eventually began to produce a heavier, modified copy of the Soviet mortar as the 12cm s.GrW42.



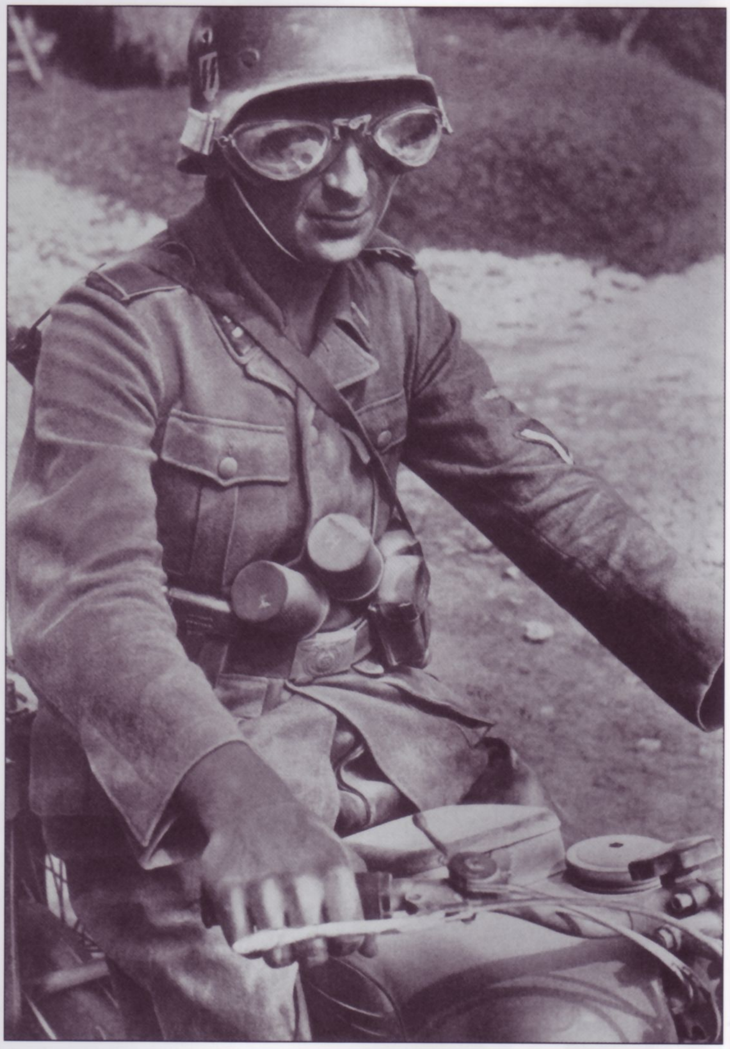
MG34-armed Waffen-SS troops during a lookout somewhere in the Eastern Front. They scout a route beside a drainage canal.



Waffen-SS troops, accompanied by Army personnel aboard a train, patrol the vast railway system on which the Germans relied for supplies and reinforcements, August 1942. Regardless of the "at-the-ready" attitude of the SS-Oberscharführer with the drawn 9mm P08, the troops do not appear to be overly concerned with a partisan attack, or they would be facing outward with weapons at the ready. The officer to the right is identifiable as such by the two white strips on his camouflage smock.

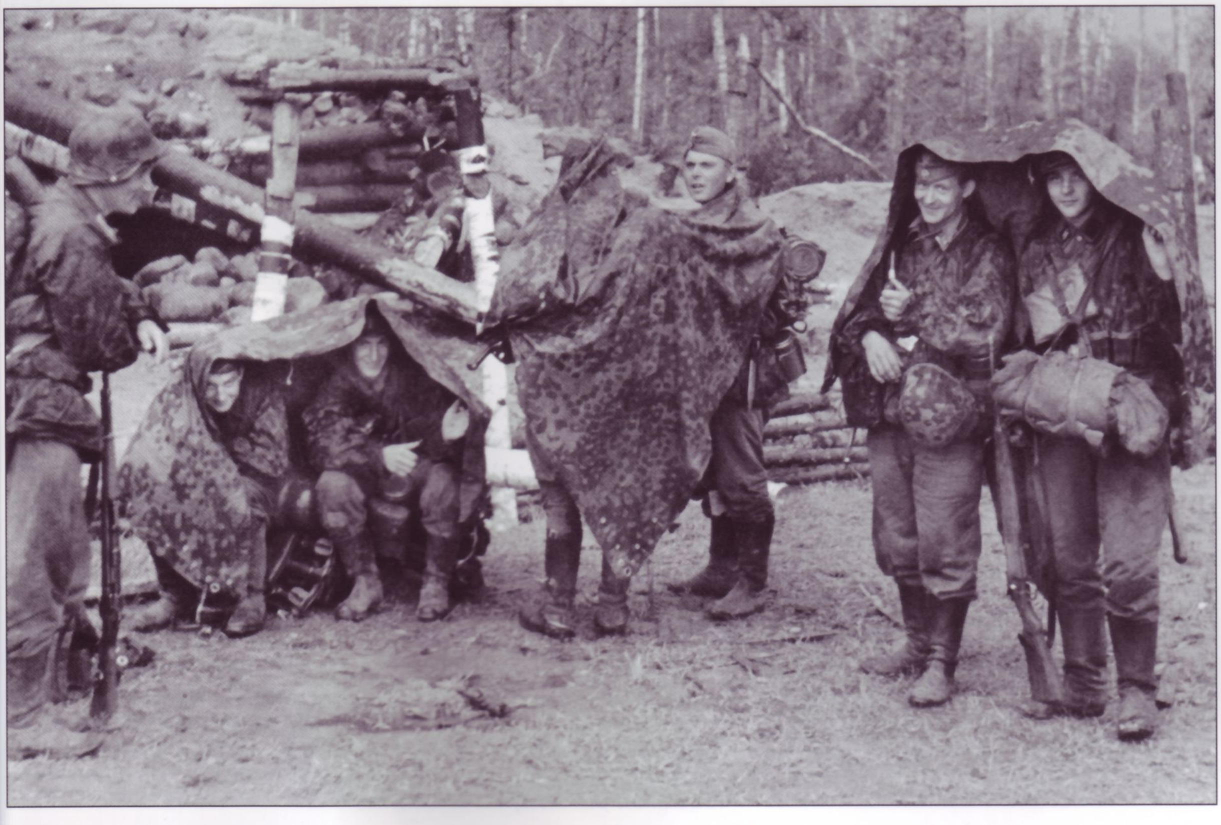


Hitler, accompanied by Himmler and their considerable entourage, en route to the Berlin Sportpalast to open the new the Winterhilfswerk, September 1942. Hitler takes the salute of an ""LAH"" guard company, its commander walking just behind him.

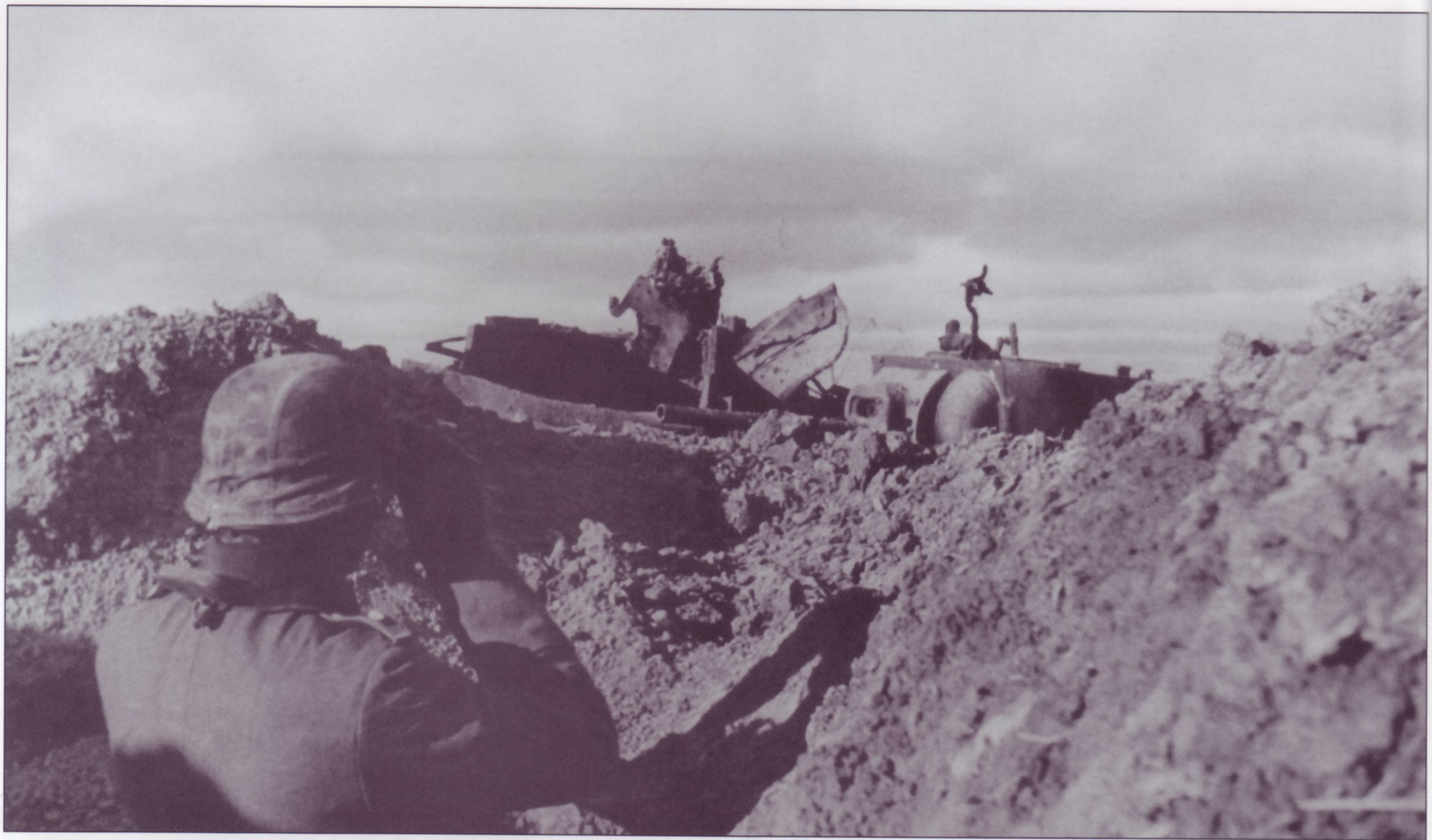


A dust-covered motorcycle messenger rests, September 1942. This individual is an Unterführeranwärter (NCO aspirant), identifiable by the braid loop at the base of his shoulder strap in his arm of service color. He has signed on for less than 12 years service; if he was a career NCO signed on for over 12 years of service, he would wear a 9mm wide braid band on his shoulder strap. Note the acceptance stamps on the heads of the Stg24 grenades.

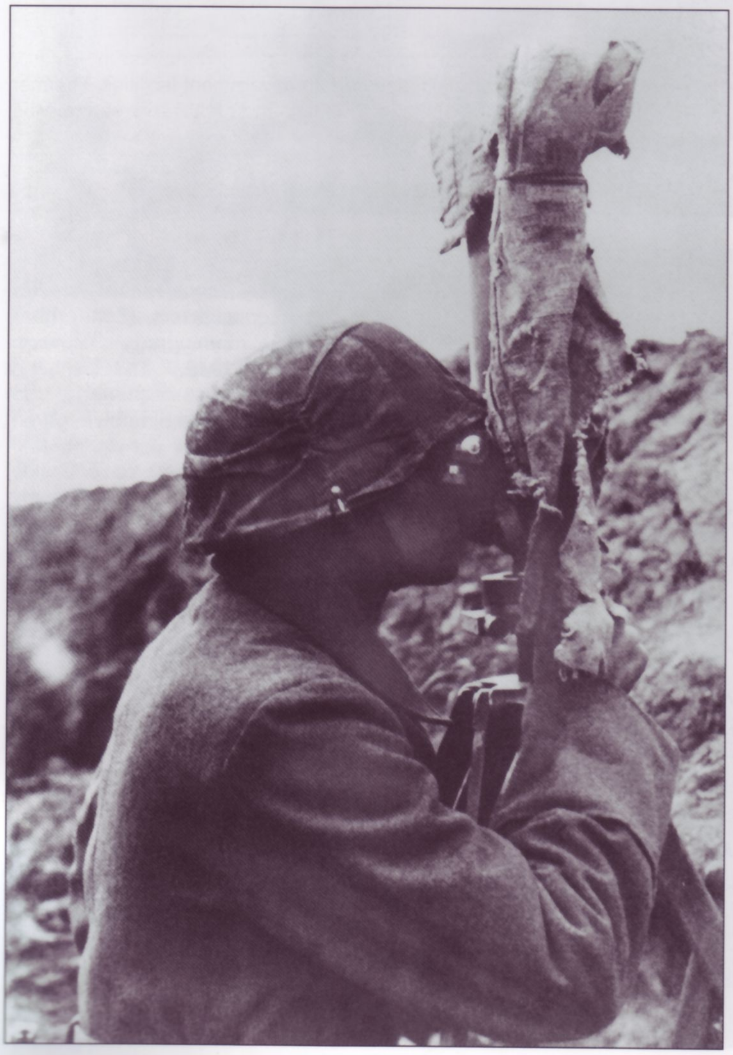
"Totenkopf" signals troops repair field telephone lines in the autumn mud, Ostront, 1942. Many kilometers of telephone line were strung between and within units, which demanded endless repairs owing to artillery and mortar fire, severe weather (which caused tree limbs to fall and cut wires), and friendly vehicle traffic.

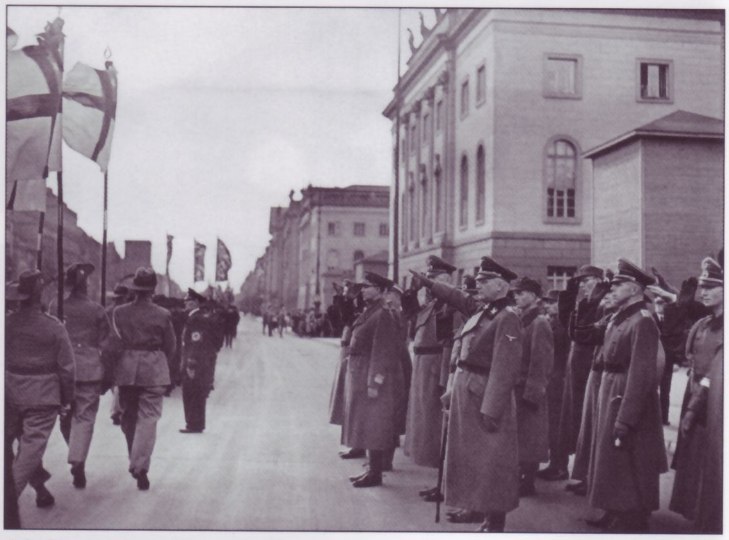


SS-Polizei-Division troops share shelter quarters (Zelte) near Leningrad, autumn 1942. The Zeltbahn was printed in predominately green colors (for spring and summer) on one side and predominately brown colors (for autumn and winter) on the other side, in varied patterns. The triangular-shaped shelter-quarters were 8-feet, 3-inches-long on one edge and 6-feet, 3-inches long on the other two edges. It could be worn as a rain cape where the opened slit in the center could accommodate the wearer's head. Four of them could be buttoned together to form a four-man, pyramid-shaped tent. Simple shelters could be rigged using one or two Zeltbahnen.



An SS-Oberscharführer scans enemy positions beside an artillery-blasted KV-1 tank, its 76mm gun visible, October 1942. The area is to the south of Lake Ilmen where the "Totenkopf" Division fought the previous year.



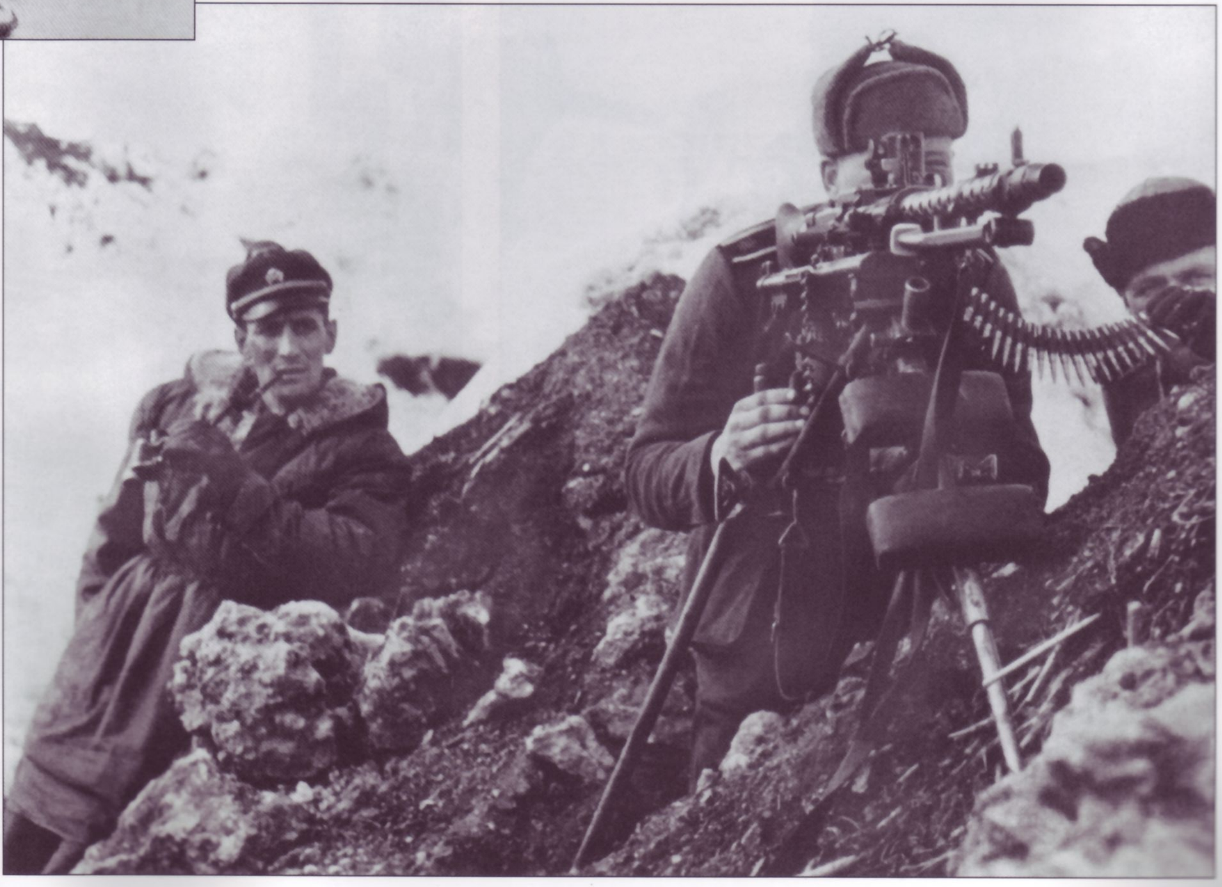


SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhart, accompanied by German and Finnish officers, salutes German World War I veterans of the Southwest Africa campaign, Berlin, November 1942. There was a Finnish unit within the Waffen-SS, but due to difficulties in Finnish-German relations, it was disbanded in 1943.

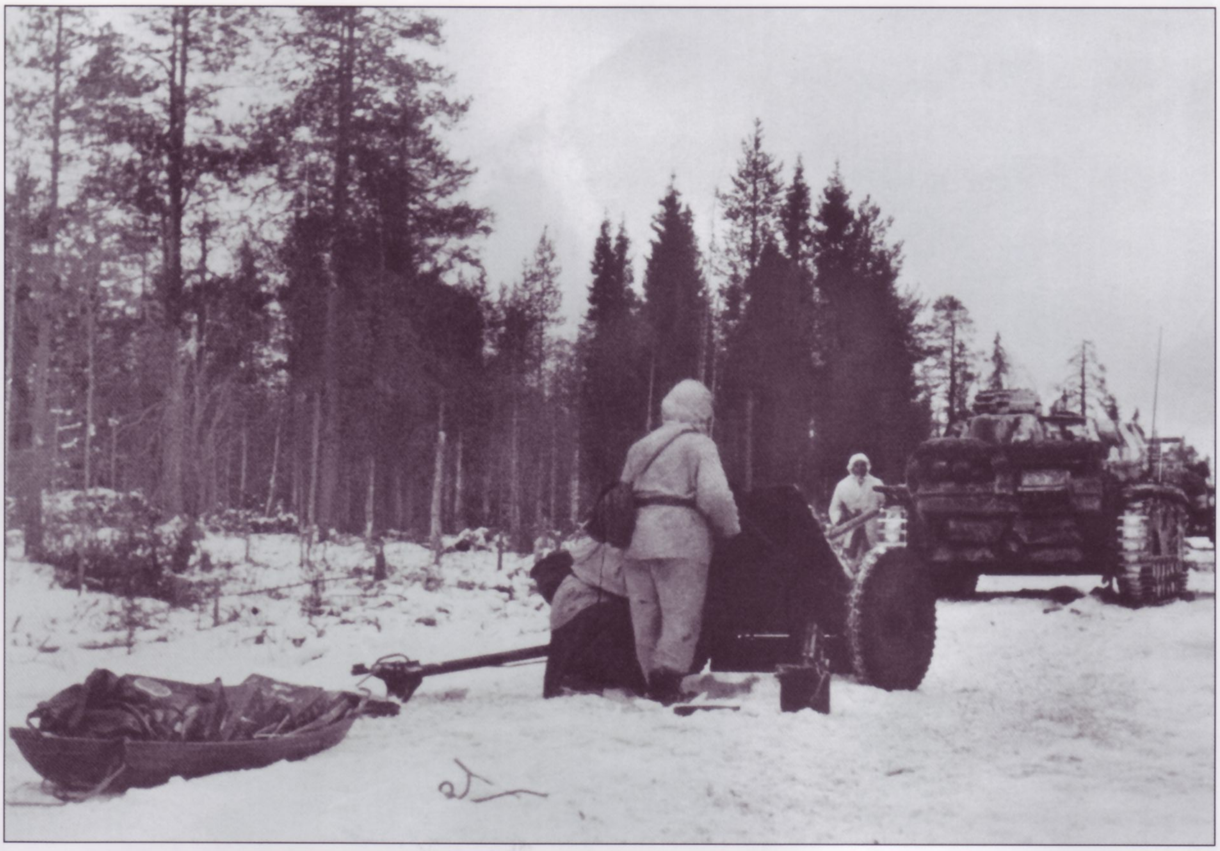
An artillery observer looks for targets using scissors binoculars. Note how the telescope is camouflaged with canvas fabric secured by string. Each artillery battery had an observer troop located in frontline positions, where they were in direct communications with their battery by field telephone or radio (more commonly the former).

While the "LAH" Division fought at the front, honor guard units (Wachtruppen) remained in Berlin to protect Hitler, other key party dignitaries, senior SS officials, and certain government facilities. The men assigned to these units were selected for their personal appearance, height, and military bearing. Most were combat veterans, many of whom had suffered wounds.

An MG34 heavy machine-gun team undertakes training in the Caucasus Mountains. The officer to the left rear wears a fur-lined coat while the men wear fur caps. Both items were procured by the SS and produced in a variety of versions. The MG34 and MG42 used the same 50 and 250-round metallic linked belts. Any number of belts could be linked together, but the individual cartridge links were permanently fixed together and did not break into separate links as American disintegrating link belts did. Crews recovered expended belts to be reloaded with cartridges, as belts were in short supply



"Nord" Division troops fight their way though a forest. Specialized tactics and techniques were developed for forest fighting and if roads were available there were opportunities to employ tanks, here Pz.Kpfw. IIIs armed with 5cm guns. In the foreground is a 3.7cm Pak36 anti-tank gun. These guns could be employed to knock out pillboxes and bunkers, but their small shot-weight severely limited them in this role. The sled carrying the gun's equipment and ammunition is an "Ahkio", a small boat-shaped sled orginating in Finland that could be hauled by a couple of men.



SS soldiers are seen here in a wind tunnel wearing experimental insulated winter uniforms and boots, late 1942. This was a reversible two-piece suit with white on one side and field gray on the other.

The new winter uniforms were issued before the winter ended, although not all troops received them. Here, a patrol checking field telephone lines in a city wears them. The men are armed with MP40 machine-pistols. The new uniforms were extremely popular and were worn constantly, often not removed for weeks on end. This led to the white camouflage effect being negated because of dirt, mud, grease, and food stains.

ISBN 962-361-105-6

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